



# 沉月之鑰

卷一

一世

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封面繪圖



CHEN YUE



KEY OF THE  
SUNKEN  
MOON

ZHI YAO

1 HUAN SHI

SHUI QUAN

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# About Giraffe Corps

We giraffes started running across the grass on *November 11, 2011, 11:55*. We hold cakes in one hand and English words on the other. We pride ourselves with our far-fetching neck and vision. We believe they will aid us in spreading the love of Asian novels to the English-speaking creatures.

We like cookies too.

## Group Anthem

I write allegiance on the flag of the Graffie Corps of Languages, and to the Giraffe for which it reads, one group, Graffie Corps, translated, with sunglasses and cookies for all.

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## Author & Illustrator Introduction



### Shui Quan / Author

Hopefully everything will be well in 2011.  
Hopefully I can fix the flaws in my personality  
and face all challenges.  
(Why is the Author's Information being used for  
New Year's resolutions?)

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### Zhu Guan@CIMIX / Illustrator

Monkey. Cancer. Born in Hong Kong.  
Likes steamed fish.  
Living a Hunter's life lately (MHP3)...  
I will work hard! Just doing a rare slacking  
in a busy schedule...

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## *Letter of Recommendation*

The first feeling this story gave me was that of an extravagant feast.

Creating entirely independent and unique worlds seemed to be Shui Quan's specialty. At first glance, this story seemed a little solemn, as though you had dressed up and walked into a high class restaurant to enjoy a luxurious meal.

But then you read on, and out popped a fortune-teller protagonist who had been cursed to say the wrong things all the time, and would constantly end up in the most tragic situations thanks to this... Although what he had to go through was very sad, the tips of my lips still arched up time after time. This is a perfect example of laughing at another's misfortune, everyone. It's not a good thing to learn!

(But I just can't help but keep laughing! Hahahaha!)

It was as if you were enjoying caviar and truffles, but then the restaurant's owner suddenly forced a waiter next to you to start entertaining guests and so started doing some aerobic dance... It was tragic for the waiter, but it was a blessing for the customers.

Not only was there a bountiful feast in front of you, but there was entertainment as well. You could eat and watch. How could that not be a blessing?

While enjoying the structure of a somber world, you can't refrain from spewing out huge laughs thanks to the protagonist's sad yet hilarious suffering. Yet, at the same time you're chuckling, things temporarily hidden in this amusement continue to reveal themselves.

The world in this story is dismal; with laughter, faint sadness, and much vagueness and mystery... Shui Quan's different arrangements for Chen Yue Zhi Yao turn it into a multilayered cake. Take a bite and you'd find that it tastes sweet, salty, sour, spicy, and bitter at the same time. It's as though this cake shadows the flavors of a human's life: rich, but real.

Chen Yue, Chen Yue. Maybe you should just rename yourself to Life instead.

What is the key to life, I wonder? What journey should I take up once I open it?

Let's flip open this Chen Yue Zhi Yao then, and begin the search!

*Yu Wo*

# Introduction

*"I wish to be pulled to your side like the sunken moon is drawn west..."*

No matter how breathtaking a sunset, the beauty meets its demise as the fading sun disappears behind the mountains.

No matter how radiant the dawn is, the destiny it meets in the end is to be swallowed by the darkness.

Dusk was but a prelude to the night where ebony shadows and a vexing moon reside. There the fragile moonlight could never drive away the darkness.

I stood in front of the city gates peering into the distance, yet I didn't know what I was looking for. With wandering thoughts, I took out my notebook and added another stroke to the many scribbles. The feeling was no longer as profound as when I wrote the first.

Today, Hui Shi still hadn't returned.

"Lord Luo Shi, we are ready to depart."

"Hmm."

I packed up my notebook and fixed my expression until it was no different from usual.

"Let's go."

Hui Shi always told me that I shouldn't mind my status, that I should just have fun like other children. My hand gently brushed against the jade plate hanging from my waist. Looking past my name carved on the plate, I caught a glimpse of the red tassel hanging beneath. With a slight frown, the usually tense feelings tightened even more.

Only five people in The Eastern City were given jade plates with the name "Shi". Among the five, only my tassel was the common red.

"The people sent from Luo Yue this time aren't especially strong. We should be able to get it successfully."

Following at my left, that person probably didn't bear any ill intention when he said that. It still made my mood worsen nonetheless.

"If it was Yin Shi, Ling Shi, or one of the others who came, you'd be more at ease, wouldn't you?"

I didn't mean for it to sound so prickly.

I wish I could be more honest. If I were, maybe more people would like me?

Although I thought that, I still could not do it.

“I’m... I’m sorry! Lord Luo Shi, that’s not what I meant!”

After hearing the terror-filled apology, I ignored him and silently continued.

This world was called Huan Shi. When I was born, “Chen Yue” had already existed for a long, long time.

In the beginning, The Eastern City and the Western City discovered “Chen Yue” together. As an artifact of the gods, Chen Yue possessed unbelievable power. It attracted the wandering souls of other worlds, created paths that led them to ours, and gave new life by providing them with new bodies. Our two cities took turns greeting these people and allowing them to become part of the community as New Residents.

New Residents were important human resources. In recent years, the welcoming process gradually became a battle as neither city wanted to see its enemy grow stronger. Whether it was Luo Yue’s turn or ours, those despicable people from Luo Yue hogged the New Residents. Thus, whenever news of a new soul arrived, we would both send crack troops to wait at the pathway’s exit. It typically ended with bloodshed to obtain the soul. The only time we had to defeat the other troop was when the soul’s body was still forming, before they walked out of the pathway.

The troops who came to snatch the newcomer always prepared a spell to teleport themselves home. Since both The Eastern City and the Western City could do this, whoever caught the person walking out of the path first and teleports, wins.

The pathways of Chen Yue usually opened when the moon was at its zenith. And only during this time would the area surrounding the pathway be safe for humans to enter. That was why they chose to depart at dusk. When they arrived, it would be the perfect time for entrance.

“Lord Luo Shi, the people from Luo Yue have also arrived.”

I heard the report from my comrade, nodded, and looked to the field across from us.

The place was lit only by the faint threads of light from the pathway’s exit. As long as we could see our enemy’s numbers and appearance, it was enough.

I knew they could see us as well. The light reflecting off of the swords waving for battle was truly stinging. My already horrible mood worsened again.

“Prepare the spell!”

Apart from the talismans used to teleport home, there were also other ones for offense and defense. As for me, I directed a group of attackers.

I hoped to vent my feelings of irritation and emptiness in this battle.

Desiring destruction, I took out seals of attack and gazed at the people across from us.

Hui Shi, just where did you go?

I’m always searching for you, always waiting for you to return.....

\*\*\*

I’m called Fan Tong. I worked as a fortune teller. When doing business at my stall, I used the alias “Fan Tai Sui”. But since I was cursed, business became very difficult... No, I should say it actually became better, though it was a nonsense kind of “better”. It gave me complicated feelings. Oh, of course, I couldn’t leave out the details regarding my curse problem. Speaking of the incident, there was seriously no justice to it at all! Why was I so unlucky—I called this lady an “aunt” once, and she cursed me! She cursed that for nine out of every ten sentences I say, my words would be reversed. And it came true! Her face was too mature. Was it my fault I couldn’t tell her age?

So what exactly did this mean for me? Take this for example. When I saw a male customer, I'd want to call him a "mister", but my mouth would blurt out "miss". Then he would beat me up. What? You say this wasn't serious? It was clearly a crisis! Alright, let me clarify this. No need to thank me. You're welcome.

It worked like this:

"Miss." I get hit with a painful punch.

"Miss, I didn't mean to say that. It's because..." Another punch.

"Miss, please let me explain..." Again.

"Miss..." And again.

"Um, Mister..."

"You blind ass. Did you just realize I was a guy?!"

And I'd get beaten anyways.

This meant that I had a ten percent chance of saying something normal. But what was the use! If it only showed up the tenth time, didn't that mean I would've already been punched nine times? Actually, no. Usually, it was not just one punch near the end. I learned this from experience by the way... but that was beside the point. Other than the words being reversed, what was worse was that not every single word changed. So even if I tried to think the opposite of what I want to say, it was still useless. I had already experienced the superpowers of this curse and the many incredible functions it came with. Now, I was more than full from tasting its various surprises. Plus, I was inherently an honest, good guy. Even if a guy was some gullible idiot, I wouldn't take advantage of him.

There was something else that was tragic too. When the witch cursed me, she told me the curse will only be lifted if I could hold a normal conversation with someone for ??? sentences. Well, when she was saying that important detail, the number, some kid screamed nearby and I missed it. And before I could verify the information with her, she left... Now, who knew what absurd number it could be? Maybe it was a million, maybe it was nine billion! Maybe I would rot my tongue speaking for all my seventy cherry blossom springs and still never reach that number! And it was not like I could just talk to myself either, I had to be speaking with another person. With my mouth, everyone'd probably run away after just a couple sentences

Let me think very calmly. Let me think very, very calmly.

Thanks to this curse, I was still single with no girlfriend. The closest, most intimate friend to me in my life was "the slap" ...seriously not something to be proud of.

There was no helping it. Whenever I wanted to praise a girl's beauty, my mouth would blurt out, "You're ugly," "You make me lose my appetite," "You are the most gullible sucker I know," or something similar. Because of this, no girls approached me and I hope none would. If any did, they could not be normal. I preferred quality over quantity, you know! I could live my life alone anyways! It was just that I'd have to apologize to my ancestors for not producing an heir...

Girlfriends I didn't need, but my stomach I must feed. My fortune telling service could only continue. It provided me with opportunities to converse with others as well. So hey, two birds with one stone. Although I did worry about what would happen if I did business with this mouth, this was the only job I've had until now. So even if I passed the point of no return, I would still have to try this out.

This brings us back to what I've said before. I didn't know why, but probably because my words became all mysterious sounding, and the incomprehensible sentences gave me a true master's aura, business actually became better! You could call it profiting from a disaster, but I

still couldn't accept it! Even though everything I spouted was all messy gibberish, it was beneficial for my business. Didn't that mean the fortunes I told before were all wrong? Dammit!

Ok, I had already calmly pondered for a long time, but it seemed that that was no help. Was this a dream? Why couldn't I wake up? Where was this place?

Whether it was this white pathway or that person who entrusted me with their last wish, why do they both feel like a dream?

Now that I thought about it, I must've felt sorry for that person. Even in a dream, my defect followed me and wouldn't let go. It made me waste so much time before I could agree to their dying wish. The person looked like they were about to die with their eyes open and could never rest in peace...

...so just what was this place?

If this wasn't a dream, could I be cursed by someone again? Who did I anger this time? I already refrained from addressing my customers lately!

I examined my surroundings, and then noticed the end of this path. I might as well walk towards it and see. I was already so unfortunate. What else could scare me?

Walking and walking, I arrived at the exit. When I poked my head out, I discovered that... I was still quite scared.

The attacks used by the two sides fighting each other outside were seriously no joke. The special effects I couldn't understand, but the exploding meat and blood? I understood that, no matter what logic was behind it.

Sigh. God, what should I do now? Should I bet on a winning team? Could I wake up from this dream if they win? Ahahahahah. Ouch! That guy over there was split in half! Could I faint now? Was that even possible in a dream?

"Hurry and come out!"

While the two sides ferociously beat each other to a bloody pulp and I watched them wondering if I should place a bet, a bishounen suddenly appeared in front of me. Standing at a distance, he told me to join the sea of drama...N... No. It was becoming more and more like a dream, yet it was becoming more and more... unlike one.

"No! I don't have a chicken's worth of ability! Telling me to go out is the same as telling me to die!"

Heavens! I spoke a normal sentence! It was so touching to be able to express myself properly, especially during this crucial moment regarding life and death...

The bishounen wrinkled his eyebrows. How odd. I didn't say anything wrong. Did he not understand me? Even if he didn't understand, couldn't he see my strong will to live?

"What are you talking about? You're already dead. Don't you know, Fan Tong?"

Ah?

What?

Wait wait wait waiiiiiitttt a minute! I wouldn't fuss about how you know my name, but how could I have died without knowing it! So was this heaven? Or was this hell? Could I have some hope that this was heaven? Though this place looked nothing like it...

"Lord Luo Shi! Behind you!"

While I was still confused about the whole matter, the bishounen, who I guessed was called Luo Shi, dodged to the side with a surprisingly light and graceful step... And in my face came an enormous fireball, flying towards me for full-body contact.

I heard a couple screams and cries, saw the bishounen look at me with a panicked expression on his face, and... because it seriously hurt too much, I couldn't see the current

situation. In short, it was about the same as when three billion dollars worth of cash was pressing against your body, the same “ugh” feeling that makes you want to cuss. You guys all look so surprised. Couldn’t someone just come and help me?

I was already dead. Although I still hadn’t accepted the fact or figured out why I died, was there really a need to kill me again?

No, actually, it was still debatable whether this counted as a dead person dying, or if it was just a corpse being blasted to pieces...

\*\*\*

Slender fingers soothed through the black hair that was softer than satin. Combing had just finished. It was now time to provide this beautiful hair a fitting style.

The owner of the hair sat quietly and waited for her servant to finish his job. She was the most respected Lord of The Eastern City. Of course, such a person would not need to dress herself.

“Is any hairstyle all right?”

A tray of hair accessories had already been prepared by her side. The speaker’s deep voice naturally resounded within the silent room. It did not feel like an interruption to the stillness.

“Do as you will.”

The girl answered half-heartedly. With her reply, he held a pin and began setting the various decorations with a skillful hand. The technique displayed a true mastery of the art. Shortly after, the originally loose threads of hair exuded a dignified, yet luxurious appearance. Then, he packed up the remaining tools and got ready to take leave.

“Ling Shi. Clothes.”

After placing the things back to their proper places, he was about to ask for permission to excuse himself. With the girl’s light sentence, he changed his mind and said, “Yes.”

He walked towards the cupboard hanging with gorgeous garments and accessories, and began searching for the perfect outfit to match her hair.

Logically speaking, people usually chose an outfit before dressing the hair. But since the girl only asked for clothes now, he could only switch the order and make adjustments accordingly.

Then, the makeup must be redone as well.

He carried back a long-sleeved silken dress, and helped the now standing girl unclthe her original attire. Draping the dress over her, he carefully buttoned it up from the front. He then adjusted her clothes, tied the lace around her waist, lifted her arms, and slipped them into the sleeves... Regardless, there was nothing erotic about the process.

“Who is commanding the troops this time?”

In reality, she rarely cared about the happenings within the city. Of course she didn’t know whose turn it was for the welcome ceremony. Even now, she was asking only for the sake of asking.

“Luo Shi is.”

Ling Shi replied blandly while he brought the cosmetics equipment. As expected, the girl didn’t question further. He could tell that her mood wasn’t great today.

That was probably why she tried to find a topic for conversation.

Although knowing that, Ling Shi would not comfort her or do anything particularly considerate.

Because she didn't need it. Rather than comforting words, she preferred her depressed sentiments to be kept secret.

Her supposedly impeccable self-esteem influenced herself, making her loathe anyone who discovered any hint of vulnerability from her.

The room became quiet again. Wiping off the makeup from before, he added color to the pale, clear skin with a scarlet pencil.

Her skin was like porcelain, so delicate and flawless that foundation wasn't even needed. Only some light colors for a rosy complexion was used at most. However, since she didn't favor cosmetics generally, just a couple touches to the eyebrows and lips were enough.

Once finished, she was once again the icy, stunning Queen.

...Prouder than anyone, more noble than anyone, and peerless in the whole of Eastern City.

"Is Yin Shi back?"

After the last smear of color was added to her lips, she spoke again and asked.

"Not yet. I'm guessing he will be very soon."

He didn't know what answer she wanted.

The person was spared from being called "that rascal" or "that idiot" this time.....Even if he finished his business, there was no guarantee he'd come back immediately. There were so many places that could prolong his trip, so many things that could be reasons for him to waste time, and they were not just excuses.

"Tell him to come see me when he's back."

"Yes."

He nodded at her instructions. Now, the girl had no other requests and was no longer facing him, so he quietly left her bedroom.

Along his way down the hall, his Communication Charm rang.

He picked it up, suspecting trouble again.

\*\*\*

Ever since Chen Yue opened pathways for New Residents to come in, a life-support system was constructed within both The Eastern and Western Cities — The Pond.

Although it was called The Pond, its size wasn't small and it did have a certain depth to it. It was fine for boats to float on it and it actually took quite a bit of time to make a lap around. It was actually no different from a lake, but since it had always been called The Pond, people continued to use that name. There was no particular reason why, and no one felt the need to change it.

The Pond was directly connected to Chen Yue's energy, possessing powers to construct incoming souls. Whenever a New Resident died, the soul would automatically be sent to The Pond's bottom. When soul reconstruction was complete, the person would float to the top with a new, healthy body.

During this moment as well, Chen Yue's power was in operation at the bottom of The Pond. A young boy's soul became clearer in appearance, waiting to fully merge with his new body. He opened his eyes. Fragments of hopelessness and despair from before his death still lurked in his sky-blue eyes.



Discovering that he was surrounded by water and that he couldn't breathe, the young man quickly kicked his feet and glided his arms to reach the surface.

The feeling of directly touching ice cold water with a naked body could not be called comfortable; piercing to the bones was more like it. It was also accompanied by an unnamed type of panic, he couldn't get used to it.

Penetrating the surface, he was welcomed by the chilly night air. The supposedly dazzling golden hair glued itself to his cheeks and neck. The boy raised his elegant face and saw the moon hanging in the distance.

Under the sparse, thin moonlight, he looked down at his arms and fingers, and then to the landscape by the pond's shore. The conclusion he came to instantly made him speechless. After a long while in the emptiness, with a sentient voice he asked himself...

"This is... Ye Zhi?"



# Prologue

## New Life

*“Or more accurately, midway between my old life and the new...” — Fan Tong*

Time: Midnight.

Location: Outside the Chen Yue pathway.

Situation: A bunch of people shooed away another bunch of people, then surrounded a half-dead person in panic.

Now that half-dead man was called Fan Tong, a New Resident who just arrived in this world. Logically speaking, he should've been safely transported to either the Eastern or Western City. Due to a tragic encounter with the flames of war, however, he confronted a fireball thrown by the Western soldiers. Until after the East ridded the West, Fan Tong was left lying in the same spot, sulking at his odd situation.

“Lord Luo Shi! Half his soul's already separated from the body!”

“Lord Luo Shi! What should we do now? Should we heal him? Or should we just relieve him in one slash?”

Clustered by the questioning crowd was a beautiful youth, who still appeared to be quite young. He usually remained solemn in front of others, but at this moment, he also expressed a rare case of distress.

Despite being the crowd's leader, he also couldn't settle on a decision.

While Luo Shi was troubled by this mental dilemma, Fan Tong was suffering from a physical dilemma. Ever since he was ridiculously warped to this world, he remained absolutely confused. First, he thought this was a dream but was then told he had died. Now it seemed he must die again?

He didn't want to die, but whether it be healing or death, either would still be superior to this so-tormenting-I-can-die-yet-cannot-die, bloody blur of a situation.

“If he died here, which Pond would his soul go to...” Luo Shi asked with a stiffened face. There really were no other New Residents who had just arrived and died unmanaged. Whether he

would still float from the Pond was still uncertain, but if he flew to the Western City, didn't that mean offering the rival a free gift? They were here to snatch the resource, not to clown around.

Although Fan Tong understood their language, he still couldn't comprehend what they were saying, as he wasn't prepped with the proper knowledge.

"Kill me..."

After laboriously squeezing the phrase out, Fan Tong accepted his fate and discovered that his mouth had betrayed him again.

He originally wanted to tell them not to kill him, but it became the opposite meaning. If he really died because of this, he'd definitely go dig out that woman who cursed him and take his revenge...

However, after some thoughtful consideration, running thousands of miles to find someone even after death sounds quite troublesome. Looks like it'd be better to contemplate on this matter some more.

"You..."

Luo Shi hesitated for a moment and started again with an unsure expression,

"You're hurting that much?"

*Nonsense! You can dare to ask this question because you've been pampered and spoiled your whole life and never got hit by a fireball!*

Fan Tong roared inwardly. Although setting a fireball experience as the criteria for being a spoiled person would cause too many people to fit the bill, he had no energy to measure the logic of this thinking.

"It doesn't hurt at all!"

*That definitely wasn't a show of endurance. It's the curse acting up again.*

*Must you make conversation now? It's wrong to talk, and it's wrong to stay silent.* Fan Tong sensed a waft of hopelessness and misery surmounting him.

Luo Shi's gaze turned leery, probably because there was no way that wouldn't hurt. Saying to kill him one second and saying it didn't hurt the next, this contradiction was not conceivable to him.

Fan Tong really wanted to ask these people. If they're not killing or saving him, then weren't there any painkillers they could give him? While he pondered on how to express his intentions correctly, Fan Tong noticed that everyone's attitude suddenly became very respectful; they even parted a pathway. It seemed another person came.

"Lord Ling Shi."

That person headed towards Luo Shi. Lit by the exit's light, the person's appearance clearly surfaced as well, causing Fan Tong's eyes to fixate in that direction.

*A God... A Goddess? So this place really is heaven?*

"Ling Shi, how should we deal with this...?"

Luo Shi compressed his lips and reluctantly asked for help. He was also the one who beckoned Ling Shi to come using the Communication Seal earlier. He felt a bit depressed about his inability to handle the situation and his need to rely on someone else.

Meanwhile, Ling Shi didn't even use a moment's hesitation before announcing his verdict.

"Toss him in the pathway and finish him. He can revive there."

Fan Tong suddenly plunged into hell from heaven.

*Not a goddess, but a witch?*

"So the pathway has revival functions as well."

Luo Shi gave a breath of relief while clamping a seal on one hand and showing a “so it was this simple” expression.

*Wait, wait a minute...* Fan Tong’s eyes grew round like saucers and wanted to tell them to stop, but there was a ninety percent chance he’d end up saying “Faster!” or “Come get me!” or something. Although there was still that ten percent chance, would these people even pay attention to what he was saying?

“Since you said even these injuries aren’t painful, then what’s coming next should be nothing.”

Luo Shi probably saw his horrified face and wanted to explain a bit to alleviate him.

But “not hurting” had been a misunderstanding since the start.

The lackeys on the side lifted Fan Tong’s body and tossed him into the passage before he could protest. Fan Tong sensed that these people were already treating him like a corpse. Before he died “this time”, Fan Tong saw Luo Shi holding and then tossing a piece of paper in the air before a fire-lit scroll danced towards his face in beautiful movements.

“Driven Fire!”

Considering the visual effect and heat burn, it wasn’t too different from the giant fireball. Days later, however, Fan Tong would discover that Driven Fire was merely the most basic attack in the book...

Although it might sound sound odd, but to commemorate his first death in this world, Fan Tong still hoped that he was killed by a dazzling, high-level finishing move. Anyone destined to die desired at least this much!

Yet, to be finished off by such a weak attack... that was just implying he’ll always remain an extra in the story, impossible to ever turn a new page...

### ◎Fan Tong’s Afterword

Based on my experience earned from years of fortune-telling management, I can confidently say that this was a horrible start. Ah, this wasn’t grand enough! Couldn’t you give me a bowl to drum-roll on? Alright, I know I’m asking for too much, since you guys didn’t even have painkillers.

Even if I wanted to demand a bowl, I’d just end up asking for a wooden fish<sup>1</sup>, right? Story of my life.

You say my life ended already? That’s correct. Based on what I just saw and experienced, I had apparently died two times already, all on the same day. I’m not sure how I died in the original world, but I was clearly roasted to death this time.

Why did that beautiful boy choose to use fire? As deduced by my brilliant intelligence and wisdom, he must have been trying to lessen my pain. If a huge fireball didn’t hurt, then a flame attack should be nothing. Was he really this considerate? Was human nature really this beautiful? Why do I suddenly feel super naive the more I think about this? There could be thousands to millions of reasons, but more than likely the real reason wasn’t what I just said. Anyways, the past was past. I guess I’ll just optimistically face my future. Maybe I could start a fortune-telling business in this world.

This world was truly fascinating. Or should I say, confusing. My body grew back anew, similar to skin-shedding. As for what happened to my old body... it was fine to leave that

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<sup>1</sup> Wooden percussion instrument used by monks during rituals.

unmentioned. Okay, okay. I didn't have the guts to look at it. I really didn't have a fetish for close inspection of my own corpse. Really!

Also, how kind was it of this pathway. Not only did it make me a new body, it gave me some clothes. Clothed in this world's fashion, I could save some face when I had to walk outside. Bravo, bravo.

When I climbed out of the passage's exit, the person as beautiful as a goddess yet as cold-blooded as a witch walked up to me. She raised her right hand, her robes floating gently in the wind, and appeared exactly like a deity. With those elegant fingers, she waved a motion. I saw a watermark-like object diffusing, and... it appears I fainted, losing many, many fragments of my memory.

# Chapter 1

## Deadman Unconfirmed

*“Sounds like I’m starring in a horror film. Am I horror film material? Wait, no, am I even the star?” – Fan Tong*

The Eastern City looming in the silence continued to radiate light at night. Torches on the city walls lightened the gates and the surrounding periphery.

The Eastern City. The board inscribed with these three words hung majestically above the city doors. The stone wall seemed like a solid structure despite its long existence; the bricks felt clean and placid, displaying no signs of weathering.

Across the widely-welcoming gates, one could see orderly roads and houses. The framework of these civilian dwellings remained primarily low-set and simple, complementing the appearance of the city’s outskirts.

Some businesses still hadn’t closed in this dead of night. The alleys clustered around them were all bustling with activity and illuminated like day, contrasting with the soundless residential areas.

On his way to the city, Fan Tong had already been drilled with much of this world’s knowledge.

According to what they said, this world contained a treasure called “Chen Yue”. They didn’t clarify on exactly what this thing was, but Fan Tong assumed it was probably similar to the satellites orbiting Earth. The clothing and architecture here though, showed a prehistoric and ancient civilization. No one would know what a satellite was, and so Fan Tong could not confirm with them.

It was said that a long time ago, the Eastern City’s Queen and the Western City’s Emperor discovered Chen Yue together. Fan Tong took a while until he realized “Luo Yue<sup>2</sup>” actually referred to the Western City. Since the moon sets on their side, they were named as so.

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<sup>2</sup>落月: descending moon



As for the Western City's residents, they call the Eastern City "Ye Zhi"<sup>3</sup>, referring to how the morning sun always rose from the East.

Chen Yue possessed incredible power. Not only could it lure souls across the universe to this one, it could provide these wandering spirits with new bodies. However, the souls attracted by Chen Yue must fit under certain conditions. People who died in an accident, people who died filled with regrets, children who died before fully maturing; it was these types of souls who were more likely to be beckoned to this world.

Fan Tong carried loads of doubts when he heard this. Actually, he suspected Chen Yue probably grabbed living souls as well. If not, why couldn't he even remember his own death and just miraculously ended up here?

On a side note, current citizens would aid humans from alien worlds in becoming familiar with the culture here. To settle the new members quickly as New Residents, they'd cast memory suppression spells, sealing off parts of the person's original memory. That was exactly what Ling Shi just performed on Fan Tong. Fan Tong was unconscious for but a moment when he encountered the spell.

In that same moment, Ling Shi warped back to the city. As for Luo Shi, he traveled on foot with everyone else. Apparently, they did prepare seals to teleport home, but it'd be wasteful to use them unless it was a crucial situation. It ended with Luo Shi walking home, explaining basic knowledge to Fan Tong along the way.

After joining the Eastern City, residents may polish their skills to improve their social standing. As a reward for each rise in rank, part of their original memories will recover. Fan Tong cared little for his sealed memories. What was sealed cannot be remembered, and thus he wouldn't be able to connect their missing links to other events anyway. Frankly, he wasn't motivated at all to put forth the effort.

Fan Tong wasn't aware which memories Ling Shi sealed away, but since nothing felt off, then everything should be okay.

"After we return to the city, we'll prepare a temporary home for you. A specialist will come tomorrow and explain."

"Ok."

Since their departure from dusk till now, more than half the night had passed, and fatigue could be seen on everyone's faces. Fan Tong also felt exhausted, but he became exhausted just from walking to the city.

Until their arrival at the Eastern City's entrance, Luo Shi didn't talk to him again. Fan Tong wanted to ask a few questions, but in this situation, the smart man would remain quiet.

Listening to explanations alone was very simple. All he had to do was to go "uh huh", "okay", "uh huh uh huh" the whole time. These responses required little variation, maybe a change to "wha?" at most, but that wasn't too difficult. He just had to wait for more explanations and he could continue to go "uh huh uh huh" again. Very convenient.

The small troop grew delighted upon seeing their home city. Everyone wanted to rush back and rest, but a situation suddenly occurred.

They heard frantic footsteps from afar. No, it was from afar, but in a flash, the sound was no longer from a distant place and was approaching at an alarming speed. Everyone turned to look, and when they saw a person rocketing towards the gate while riding a magical beast, their expressions froze and they parted to the sides in tacit agreement. All but Fan Tong, that was.

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<sup>3</sup>夜止: a stop to the night. Another name for the Eastern City.

Fan Tong admitted that his response reflex was a bit slow and his eyes weren't the best either, but...

"Aghhhhhhh! Why's there a person in the middle of the road!"

But... was this universe really such a hazardous place? Where people with slower reactions and less than perfect eyesight were killed at any moment?

When Fan Tong heard that person's cry and got trampled flat by his dutiful beast, he suspected and really wanted to ask... was this what people call illegal driving?

As for the pain, he'd get used to it after a while right? Actually, would he get used to it or get tired of it?

"Fan Tong! Why'd you get yourself killed again?"

Before his soul completely left the body, Luo Shi screamed at him in disbelief.

*The last time was because you killed me! You don't have the right to ask!*

Although Fan Tong ached to scream back, he would have to wait until his body has regenerated.

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Experience often upsets theory. If you've experienced it, you'll understand it. What had happened to you, you would never forget. Experience was the best method to learning. All hired employees must undergo a training period, an unpaid month to associate with the company's environment... In any case, all these quotes generally convey: Whether you understand it or not, no one knows. You probably don't know either. So let's have you experience it, and you'll see...

Fan Tong was currently living this principle – using death to understand Eastern City's resurrection system, the great complex powered under Chen Yue's influence: the Pond.

If a New Resident bearing the Eastern city's mark died, his soul would be delivered to the bottom of the city's Pond. Chen Yue's energy will construct the soul a new body, guaranteed to look exactly the same as before. The skills and knowledge developed before would also be included, not one will be missing.

However, the Pond's system still wasn't as considerate as the passageway's. Fan Tong was missing his clothes. This made him want to complain that the "Not one will be missing" slogan was a scam.

Awfully deep and as wide as a lake, the Pond almost caused he-who-was-not-acquainted-with-water to become a fresh, floating corpse again. Luckily, Luo Shi was very altruistic and brought a batch of people to lug him out. If not, he'd probably drown, die, regenerate, and drown again until someone found him.

Fan Tong felt that the system, as though designed to force the creation of swimming experts, was truly not human-friendly. If something happened, that Pond would be filled with his corpses! Each one's puffiness would be different as well. Wasn't that just disgusting? Had no one died this way before? Wouldn't others who die and regenerate here later be shocked?

Fan Tong believed this conversation will likely happen: "Ahh, Nice to meet you!" "No, I've seen your corpse before! What happened to you? A whole pile's floating around. I carefully counted and you died a total of thirty-eight times! This is public contamination, you know! Can't you at least clean up after yourself?" "Eh... but... to clean my own corpse, it feels really weird..." "Then what should we do? We, the people who bump into your corpses our whole way swimming to shore! That day, a whole hundred and eight people died. Every single one of them

now recognizes your face!” “I’m really sorry. But wow, the corpses are already so bloated they’re distorted beyond recognition, I’m surprised you can still tell they’re me!”...

*It’s possible to even become a celebrity because of this. Just the thought is horrifying.*

Although people were here to salvage him, and he was basically grateful at heart, it was still difficult to cheer and rave when one was being net in like a fish.

Upon boarding the boat and putting on a set of new clothes, his mood fell even heavier when Luo Shi solemnly spoke to him, “I think you know already that New Residents will always regenerate here after death. Although that technically makes the New Residents immortals, don’t just casually die and think it’s okay. Let me tell you some things beforehand right now.”

Hearing this, Fan Tong really wanted to refute. Why would he think it was alright to just casually die? He was intensely scared of pain!

“The body you’re using now lasts ten years under normal circumstances. Dying within ten years is a waste of resources, and you must pay fees to change bodies. Don’t think no one will know if you secretly died. The Pond leaves a record. However, in consideration for the people who just arrived and are not used to this environment, the first three deaths within the year are free. It won’t be afterwards. You’ve already used two of those chances, so take good care of yourself.”

“What! Why? I didn’t even step into the Western City yet. That still counts?”

“This is the Eastern City! Is your brain still incomplete?”

Facing Luo Shi’s harsh outpour and stern image, Fan Tong once again failed to voice his suffering. Of course he knows this was the Eastern City. It was exactly because he knows that it became the Western City when he tried to say it.

“It’s not cheap to change bodies, so careless New Residents often fall deep into debt. It’s not so much that you can’t regenerate if you’re unable to pay up, but severe pain will be produced during regeneration. Some people’s debts are so insanely large and impossible to pay back, they’d stop working, stop taking care of themselves, and would just mindlessly die. As punishment, pain will increase in proportion to the amount of debt.”

With Luo Shi’s every word, Fan Tong’s face scrunched up a bit more. When Luo Shi finished, Fan Tong’s expression could only be described as utterly miserable.

*It’s already sad that I keep dying, and now I risk gathering a large debt as well? All those together already make a tragedy, yet the pain of rebirth will be more intense each time? This place really isn’t heaven but hell instead. Just what did I do to be clawed into hell? Did I gather too much karma as a fortune-teller?*

*Riding in this wooden boat on the Pond sure feels like crossing the River Styx. If this is true, then doesn’t that make Luo Shi and the others demon minions...* Fan Tong flung off this wild flight of fancy and decided to empty his mind before reaching the coastline.

Eastern City’s resurrection pool wasn’t contained in a closed off room. Although the sides were surrounded by dirt walls, leaving only one exit at the city’s west, the Pond was open-air. One can see the vast clear sky, the white clouds, and the silver moon.

Hidden from sight now, the moon sank lower and became hidden underneath the horizon. That was how long it took for everyone to finally go home. They had stayed up the entire night.

Breathing a different air, absorbing a different atmosphere, gazing at the sky, and chilling under the somewhat breezy wind, Fan Tong finally felt his body relaxing and his emotions calming.

...If not for those two deaths today, the loveliness of everything would probably increase much more.

“I’ve never seen anyone die so quickly. I’m afraid you’ve just set a new record,” said Person A.

“I know right? Last time, this guy got crushed when the city sign coincidentally fell on him. I thought that’d be the fastest record, but what do you know. Someone died before even reaching the city!”

*Deriving pleasure from someone else’s misfortune and gloating about it isn’t right, you know. Even if I’m a record-holding champion, I don’t feel the slightest ounce of happiness!* ...The corner of Fan Tong’s eye twitched.

“Row the boat! What are you chatting for?” With an icy expression, Luo Shi immediately ended the conversation. Person A and B hushed up at once and diligently continued their work.

A few boats of similar size perched near the Pond’s shore, complete with oars and fishnets. It seemed they were convenient measures for hauling friends and family at any time. Upon seeing this, Fan Tong didn’t know how he should feel.

After passing through a somewhat winding underground alley, Fan Tong finally entered the city’s innards. Fan Tong’s roving eyes glanced in all directions as he walked steadily and surely on the roads paved with ash-white bricks. Everything felt novel and fascinating.

The light of dawn began to surface from the east. Naturally, not many pedestrians strolled the streets so early in the morning. When Fan Tong gazed far into the north, a grand structure captivated him.

The looming structure was a mystical ice blue that projected a sense of transparency, probably an illusion caused by reflecting lights. It sat atop the only hill nearby, which further hinted at its distinguished status. Just by looking, spectators could find wholehearted respect for the solemn building.

“That’s...” Fan Tong pointed to the structure and asked the one walking next to him. The person yawned and answered in an exhausted tone.

“That’s Shen Wang Dian, the dwelling of Her Majesty the Queen and the five Lords of Shi.”

*Basically, where the dictators live right?* Fan Tong understood.

*But, Shi...?*

Fan Tong glanced suspiciously at Luo Shi. Noticing him, Luo Shi furrowed his brows in discontent.

“That’s my house. Do you have a problem with that?”

“Yes.”

*I really didn’t mean to start a fight.*

“And what problem would that be?”

A dim shade shrouded Luo Shi’s delicate face. Fan Tong’s memory wasn’t so horrible that he’d forget what happened the same day. He clearly remembered how he died the first time and the sensation when Driven Fire roasted his life to a black and white crisp...

What to do? Fan Tong became a bit scared. Even if he wanted to say “I just didn’t know the person welcoming me is a noble comparable to the queen,” there was a very high chance the words will become insults belittling both of them instead.

He labored to find something that wouldn’t sound odd even when reversed.

*I could have just shaken my head earlier! What possessed me to answer with words?*

“Lord Luo Shi, we’ve arrived.”

Person B aptly spoke again and interrupted the atmosphere. On this, Luo Shi looked away. Feeling rescued, Fan Tong followed along and looked towards his temporary home in the Eastern City.

The home was one of many row houses. It appeared bland yet proper, still acceptable and had nothing in particular worth complaining about.

“Before the employee assigned to guide you comes, do not wander out of here by yourself.”

Luo Shi instructed stolidly and reminded an extra note, “We’re only lending this house to you temporarily. Although no one lives in it, it’s still government property. You will compensate for any loss or damage.”

Fees fees fees fees. Fan Tong found the Eastern City very stingy, demanding payment for every rebirth and asserting authority even in temporary housing. Was it because he hadn’t received his citizenship yet that the treatment was so horrible?

“Are you clear?”

This time, Fan Tong remembered to nod.

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Fan Tong fell asleep at dusk, but that was not the case for his tour guide. Right when he started catching some shuteye and drifted to a deeper slumber, his guest came knocking and woke him up. Sleep deprivation currently was at a maximum.

*That’s how it is when one has a cheap life. I don’t even get the right to sleep a good night’s sleep...* Lifting his muddled head, Fan Tong looked at the man beaming at him with a professional smile.

“Nice to meet you. I’m Mi Zhong, responsible for teaching you the required knowledge about Huan Shi and the Eastern City. Just call me by my name.”

*Cadelle beetle*<sup>4</sup>? Fan Tong literally translated.

“What a nice name.”

*No, I wanted to say what a strange name it was. Who would name themselves this? The world is really full of wonders.*

While thinking this, Fan Tong remained fully ignorant about his own name’s oddity and how his current thoughts complemented his name.

“Thank you for your compliment. Before I take you to see some important landmarks, let me take care of the basics.”

Mi Zhong spoke while pulling a white object from his pocket. Fan Tong had seen it before. That object usually hung atop clothing as decoration, it was called a tassel or something.

“This white tassel is yours. I’ll explain to you the meaning behind it.”

Mi Zhong cleared his throat and explained eloquently with fine professionalism.

“Our city distinguishes social ranking using different colored tassels. The spectrum begins with black as the strongest, then descends to purple, red, blue, green, and white. All who have just arrived will receive white tassels, indicating blank records in their appraisal tests. Wage is determined based on this as well, with income increasing with higher-tiered colors. Within the same color, darker shades is better than light. For example, deep blue indicates a stronger level

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<sup>4</sup> Fan Tong heard Mi Chong when Mi Zhong said his name. Mi chong is the cadelle beetle, which is a small insect that infects grains such as rice.

than pale blue. Also, whites receive no wage. Everyone begins at zero. Please do well to increase your status.”

The Eastern City truly valued money it seemed. Fan Tong dejectedly received the white tassel that symbolized his uselessness.

The tassel dangling around Mi Zhong’s waist was pale green. According to Fan Tong’s memory, Luo Shi carried a scarlet tassel and led followers with reds and blues. As for Ling Shi, who appeared for only a second, Fan Tong didn’t notice.

“Stop looking, alright? My light green tassel allows very few money each month. Fortunately there are always newcomers, so I can at least work as a tour guide. If not, I wouldn’t have enough money to pay my debt when I accidentally die...”

Seeing the man scratch his head with sighs, Fan Tong didn’t know how to comfort him. After all, he was in a stickier situation. Wasting two free rebirth opportunities right after arrival, he possessed no extra energy to sympathize with other people.

“What’s next? Since I am here, I should know who are in the ruling class, in case I offend any of them by mistake...”

*I think I already offended one yesterday.* A slightly depressed Fan Tong presumed.

“Our most honored figure is our ruler, Queen Xi Ying. The queen’s age isn’t important. She looks young anyways. You can only see her from a distance, since she only appears on certain public events. However, Chen Yue Jie, the holiday commemorating the launch of Chen Yue, will take place half a month from now. Her Majesty and the five Lords will ride to Chen Yue’s Altar and perform a ceremony. When the time comes, you can follow their carriage and revere their noble presence.”

Fan Tong nodded and Mi Zhong continued.

“Second to our Queen are our five Lords of “Shi”. I believe you’ve seen Lord Ling Shi already. As the executive controlling memories, he personally performs a ritual with every New Resident to seal their memories. Consequently, each one is enslaved by his beauty. The event rewarding memories to those who rose in rank is also carried out by Lord Ling Shi himself! Sigh, why can’t I scale up faster. I really want to see Lord Ling Shi...”

*That last sentence was just your inner voice and desire, right? Is this level of professionalism alright for a tour guide?*

While Fan Tong didn’t deny Ling Shi’s beauty, his feelings after Ling Shi dictated his death was a whole different matter.

“Lord Ling Shi also acts as the Queen’s close attendant. I heard he tends to every trivial matter, from dressing her hair to preparing her bath. Ah, I envy the Queen so much...”

*You’re still not done? Also, don’t people usually envy the one who serves the Queen? Why is it switched? If hair and bathing duties are included, then what about bed service?*

“As for Lord Yin Shi, how should I say this... he’s very frank and lacks a royal conscience. An eccentric person. Probably because he’s too much of an eccentric, he still can’t find a dating partner despite being a talented and handsome guy. It’s quite unbelievable.”

“Eccentric?”

“Yeah. I heard he was out handling some affairs for a month and finally returned yesterday night. He lost control while riding a moshou<sup>5</sup> he caught for fun. That devastated a good sum of businesses after he charged through the city gates. In the end, the disturbance shocked the Queen and she scolded him as punishment.”

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<sup>5</sup> Magical beast

At least Fan Tong now knows who murdered him last night, and it appears he can never hope to ask for compensation.

“The one who brought you home yesterday is Lord Luo Shi, the youngest among the five lords. He’s only fourteen this year. His personality’s a bit hard to get along with... Right, he’s also the Queen’s son. This background added on to that personality makes him feel quite distant.”

Fan Tong turned pale.

*Dammit! Of all things to offend, I offended a prince!*

“You look horrible. What happened?”

Fan Tong listlessly shook his head. A slip of the tongue could cause eternal hate, and this might cause him another hundred deaths.

“Lord Wei Shi doesn’t appear very often. He’s probably in his thirties now. There’s not much information about him, but it seems his word weighs very heavily on the Queen. Many of her orders are decreed from his advice and suggestions. Ah, Lord Wei Shi also favors Natural Residents. He’s always bullying some New Resident and keeps suggesting unfair regulations, so New Residents generally hate him.”

Fan Tong made sure to remember his name well and waited for Mi Zhong to continue with everyone’s introductions.

“Finally, there’s Lord Hui Shi... Eh, let’s skip him for now. Let me tell you about Luo Yue.”

“Eh?”

There are clearly five of them, yet he only introduced four. He even changed the topic so obviously. Fan Tong couldn’t help but feel confused. This really caused concern.

“Is this Lord Hui Shi even more hateful than Wei Shi?”

After finishing the sentence, Fan Tong wanted to cry a bit. Why does that ten percent chance of speaking correctly only happen during trivial conversation?

“That’s not true at all! Lord Hui Shi is a very good person, and everyone really likes him! Except... Sigh...”

After Mi Zhong passionately refuted, he wistfully adopted a sad tone.

“Oh well, it doesn’t hurt to tell you. Lord Hui Shi has been missing for two years already, and there is no news of him even now. He disappeared at seventeen, and at that time, he already held a distinguished pale black tassel. You can say he’s an exceptional prodigy. That’s why the Queen adopted him as her son in the first place. In this situation, some say he died while others say he betrayed us. The matter is truly saddening... but don’t let Her Majesty and Lord Luo Shi hear about this. It’s taboo.”

Fan Tong never lived here before and thus could not sympathize with this story about Hui Shi. He just found one thing unclear.

“Don’t Natural Residents die in the Pond after living?”

*And the word reversal functions returns to normal. Luck really doesn’t come in pairs. Honestly, is this curse some A.I. programmed with self-learning capabilities? It already sensed that “Natural Residents” is the antonym of “New Residents”...*

“What are you talking about? Are you referring to how New Residents can be reborn after dying? The Queen and the five Lords are all Natural Residents. If they die, they die. They can’t revive. New Residents can keep reviving because we were already souls upon arrival. Basically, we’re just dead souls borrowing bodies from Chen Yue to move around. On the contrary, this blessing doesn’t apply to the people born here. It’s ironic, isn’t it? Since Chen Yue is originally from this world.”



What Fan Tong found most ironic was the fact that he still didn't know how he died. He felt frustrated every time he recalled this matter.

"Of course this isn't definite either. A droplet of royal blood from our Queen or Luo Yue's Emperor can revive a Natural Resident, though that person must not have died for longer than six hours. The Queen and Emperor can only use this power once a month, and when they do, they remain at a weakened state the entire day, which also caused our Queen to dislike using this power. Since Natural Residents can only relive once, Lord Wei Shi finds their lives more precious and in turn ignores the New Residents completely."

*Could this miraculous power be the reason why people enthroned them as king and queen? If it only works once a month, then they really do have to choose carefully. If they revived some insignificant person right before an important one dies, then that'd really create a problematic situation.*

Mi Zhong began to speak again while Fan Tong's thoughts wandered. Fan Tong paused in his thoughts and listened closely.

"New Residents aren't indestructible either, you know. Huan Shi weaponry is split between normal weapons and soul purging weapons. New Residents' souls disintegrate when they are killed by soul purging weapons. Afterwards, they will never regenerate again. Lord Wei Shi sees the advantage New Residents have, so he granted a soul purging weapon to each Natural Resident as protection. He even declared a verdict to purge any New Resident if they killed a Natural Resident without legitimate reason. That's why I'd suggest you avoid angering any of the original residents here. The Eastern City ardently protects them."

Unfortunately, Fan Tong already did, and a big fish at that. He could only pray that Luo Shi wasn't a stingy person who'd hold a grudge on such a small matter.

"Weapons here can speak, so don't be too startled when they do. Also, the weapon must acknowledge you before you can use it. If you're using a kitchen knife or a similar everyday tool, then the effect relatively stays the same even without acknowledgment. I'll teach you how to distinguish between New and Natural Residents once we go out... right, I said I'd tell you about Luo Yue earlier. I almost forgot."

Mi Zhong put down the bag he was carrying and informed Fan Tong that inside it were the city's clothes and provisions. Fan Tong faultily said "You're welcome" instead of "Thanks", and Mi Zhong continued explaining after some moments of awkward silence.

"Luo Yue is the Western City's alias. You should know already right? Everyone calls it that. The Western City's young Emperor is called Englar. We're uncertain of his age. Some say he's eighteen, some say he's not even ten. Anyways, the age should be under twenty. Luo Yue's law restricts anyone from publicizing his age. I heard he remains hidden for most public events, and even the more important ones are attended by substitutes. Probably no one will see his face until he becomes an adult. That side's quite complicated, isn't it... You have to remember, the people from Luo Yue are our enemies. If you happen to cross paths with them while traveling, don't hesitate to kill them."

After saying so much in one go, Mi Zhong took a short break. He drank a gulp of water and took a deep breath.

"They discriminate ranks using specialized embroidery on their belt. Five copper threads upgrade to one silver. Five silvers become one gold. The highest rank exhibits three golden threads, and that equates to our pure black tassel. Very rarely do people possess it. Alright, that's it for now. Let's head out. My mouth's tired already."

Fan Tong didn't mind going out right now, other than the fact that he seriously needed some sleep. Mi Zhong saw him put on the white tassel and attentively patched on more details.

"There's something else I must tell you. Lower ranks can challenge and defeat higher ranks to rise in ranking. There's no punishment for losing. However, the higher ranked person will drop one sub-level lower. For instance, a deep green will demote to a grass green. You're still a white right now, so no worries. You're not allowed to refuse challenges, so knit your social network well or trouble will constantly follow you... Definitely do not challenge me!"

*Do I look so brutal and ruthless? Bastard.*

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Leaving the house, Mi Zhong explained that they will first register at the school campus. Only then did Fan Tong discover the existence of mandatory classes in this world. Along their route towards school, Mi Zhong pointed out important landmarks and explained their significance.

"Look. That's the Pond on the west. If you accidentally died, that's where you'll pop back out."

*I know. I just popped out from there yesterday.* Fan Tong silently fell glum.

"You see that eye-catching building over there? That's Shen Wang Dian, where Queen Xi Ying and the five Lords live."

*I know. Because of that building, I got someone to hate me yesterday.*

"The main gate is situated in the far south. It's magnificent!"

*I know that too. I died there yesterday.*

While Fan Tong internally answered, he felt more and more depressed about his experiences in this world. He couldn't find anything good at all.

Countless pedestrians strolled the streets now that it's daytime. The eventful activities and multitude of humans created a lively atmosphere befitting of this metropolitan city. Fan Tong also took this chance to scan everyone's tassel. Most tassels were blues and greens, rarely red, while purples and blacks were nowhere to be seen.

"Come look on that side. Those people are Natural Residents."

Mi Zhong suddenly pulled on him and pointed to a crowd. Fan Tong stared for a while, but ultimately could not tell the difference.

"You can't tell? There are no marks on Natural Residents."

"Oh!"

Fan Tong felt suddenly enlightened.

The Eastern City used a spell to embed a mark on each New Resident when they arrive. With this mark, the person's soul would transfer to the Eastern City's Pond after death. This went for the Western City as well. As for Natural Residents, they did not revive and thus had no need for marks.

This so-called mark was planted within the body, and those with the same mark read the same wavelength. Natural Residents did not possess any waves, while New Residents of the Western City held a different wavelength. So it was actually quite simple to make distinction among the different classes.

"The school campus is just ahead of us. Let's go."

Actually, Fan Tong already felt impelled to sleep standing up. But upon hearing this, he could only force himself to stay awake and stride forward.

“Oh yeah. What’s your dying regret? Mind if I ask?”

Being asked so suddenly, Fan Tong felt a bit troubled.

“I don’t know how I lived. I don’t think I ever lived.”

“Oh? So you want to start anew? How noble.”

*I think you misunderstood me. I wanted to say “died”, but it swapped with “lived”. Even this small change could create a whole different meaning. How interesting.*

“Theoretically, only people who’ve died filled with regrets are summoned here. Some are so obsessed they could never pick themselves back up. Ah, you see, that’s one right there.”

Fan Tong followed the direction of his fingers and saw a man coiled on the ground. With his face distorted, the man repeatedly muttered an ambiguous statement, “I will be God of the new world!”

“How did he die?”

“It’s said that he died bearing more than two thousand gunshots.”

*Wow, two thousand shots! A superhuman?*

“People here died of all sorts of bizarre deaths. I heard this woman in Luo Yue died choking on an apple, but a few days later she disappeared. It seems she came back to life after spitting the apple back out. Mind blowing, right?”

Of course this was a more extreme example. After hearing this, Fan Tong also made an effort to recall his past life. Maybe he ate something that could’ve choked him; if that was true, then there was a chance he could live again...

Alas, he could not remember what his last supper was. Sigh.

The campus was positioned on the eastern side of the city. The Eastern City’s landmarks were quite easy to memorize. School in the east, Pond in the west, city gates in the south, and Shen Wang Dian in the north, all facing each other in those four directions.

Because the city boasted quite a large landmass, it took considerable time to walk from the southern point to the northern one. That was why they made use of a few portals along the way. Fan Tong didn’t have the photographic memory to know his way in one swoop, so he would have to rely on Mi Zhong to guide him back later.

*Hopefully Mi Zhong will draw me a map for the way home.* Fan Tong prayed.

As the only place that created new talents in Eastern City, the school campus was naturally very extensive and grand as well. After entering the stately campus doors, one could see three main structures, Shufa Xuan<sup>6</sup>, Fuzhou Xuan<sup>7</sup>, and Wushu Xuan<sup>8</sup>. Each pavilion featured a distinct style of exquisite adornment. Mi Zhong brought Fan Tong to the General Affairs Department and registered for a uniform before beginning his explanation.

“New students begin with general studies on all three subjects. If you’re particularly able in a certain field, it’s not too late to specialize in it afterwards. Also, New Residents and Natural Residents study in different classes. Shufa Xuan’s rector is Lord Yin Shi, Fuzhou Xuan’s is Lord Lin Shi, while Wushu Xuan’s is Lord Hui Shi... currently substituted by Lord Wei Shi.”

Fan Tong had some confidence in his calligraphy, so if Fuzhou required writing charms, it might match him quite well. Shufa would be a brand new experience, so playing with it a bit didn’t hurt. But as for Wushu, Fan Tong’s interest plummeted. Well, he was that clumsy type of idiot who tripped over his own feet anyway, so he didn’t anticipate any good results there.

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<sup>6</sup> School of Magic

<sup>7</sup> School of Spells and Charms

<sup>8</sup> School of Martial Arts

“Also, about the temporary home you live in right now...”

Mi Zhong suddenly remembered that this matter still hadn't been covered and thus hurriedly added, “That's because your bed location isn't determined yet. Basically, three people with white or green tassels share one room. The space will be much more compact than it is now, so be mentally prepared.”

*Of course there's no such thing as good news in this world.*

After completing his registration, Mi Zhong handed him the school schedule, reminded him to go to school on time, and started guiding him home.

“Once your bed area is decided, I will come again to help you move. This is my contact information. If you need anything, just ask, but I guess you'll have to learn the basics of Fuzhou first before using this... Oh right, there's also this.”

Seeing Mi Zhong rummaging around, Fan Tong almost thought he had a present for him. In the end, it was just a survey.

“My tour was quite detailed and thorough, wasn't it? Please help me fill out this questionnaire. It'd raise my salary. Please leave me some face and fill in “Very Satisfied”, okay?”

“...”

Fan Tong was left speechless.

In the middle of his battle with the survey, the door from the housing next to them flung open and out walked a person.

“Yo, Mi Zhong. Leading a newcomer?”

“Yeah, you too? Does someone live there?”

“About this, you see. Someone lived here all along, but the one responsible for the guy didn't leave a note before resigning, so everyone just neglected his existence. He never went to school either. Only when a newcomer came in yesterday did they notice his situation on the register. And so they sent me to check things out.”

After he finished, the man mumbled, “But the person inside doesn't seem to match with the profile...”

“Hey, Fan Tong. You have a neighbor now. There's a big chance you guys will be placed in the same room, so get along okay?”

Mi Zhong lightly patted Fan Tong's shoulders the same time Fan Tong finished the survey. Mi Zhong took the paper to look.

“...Fan Tong, you wrote my name wrong. It's Mi Zhong, not Mi Chong...”

When Fan Tong sent Mi Zhong off and jumped to bed, it was still a shining afternoon. Thus, the moon was already hanging high at night when he woke up again.

Fan Tong didn't want to become a nocturnal animal. School started classes in the daytime, and there were no night classes. This abnormal sleeping schedule must be fixed, or his new life in the Eastern City will be even more worrisome.

At that same moment, Fan Tong noticed his growling stomach. He did go for a day without eating anything. Mi Zhong told him that for his three meals, “nasty and insubstantial” public rations were provided in the streets at set times every day. If he wanted to eat better, then he could go to a restaurant. Of course that required money.

Fan Tong was here for only a day, so naturally he wouldn't have any money on him. Even if he waited until payday, a white tassel wouldn't earn him anything.

But he was agonizingly hungry. Staring blankly at home with an empty stomach was also very painful. So, although it was pointless to shop the streets with an empty wallet, Fan Tong still set out for the night businesses.

A hundred qians make one string, and the cheapest food here still asked for three strings... Mi Zhong told him that pale green tassels claim two strings each month. Also, a new body after rebirth required one hundred strings. Thanks to that, low level residents who've died a couple times were already burdened with a large debt. Even blues get only about ten strings, so it was very hard to survive just by claiming the monthly salary. Almost everyone found a job to sell their labor, and one of the simplest occupations included being a tour guide.

There was no hope for Fan Tong in becoming a tour guide with that mouth of his. He might even have to pay reparations for misleading newcomers. If he accidentally called Englar the Emperor of Eastern City, reparations alone wouldn't be enough...

No one would gift him with food even if he kept staring, so Fan Tong dully walked away. He decided to leisurely stroll around the neighborhood and hoped that that would make him forget about hunger a little bit.

Walking without direction, Fan Tong wandered to the main gate. The doors remained open at night. The style differed from what he remembered. He gave it some more attention because of this and noticed a human shadow standing by the side.

The shadow's profile looked rather familiar. Fan Tong stepped closer and recognized it. It was Luo Shi.

Knowing it was Luo Shi, Fan Tong wanted to turn around and run. But, he was a bit curious about the reason why Luo Shi didn't sleep but rather ran here in the middle of the night. The feet that rotated for escape turned back.

Under the gentle, delicate moonlight, the young boy's silhouette appeared fleeting and unreal. It even carried a sense of vulnerability.

He seemed to be waiting for someone, gazing motionlessly towards the gates' exterior. Melancholy tinted his graceful features.

Nights were in fact quite chilly this season of the year. Mi Zhong mentioned that New Residents were fairly immune to weather conditions, so when Fan Tong felt pain from that gust of cold wind blown at his face, he could tell just how cold the temperature was right now.

Yet Luo Shi stood there as though he couldn't feel the cold. He wouldn't find something to cover and warm himself.

That silhouette looked very lonely.

Suddenly, Fan Tong wanted to offer Luo Shi a fortune-telling... *Does this count as work-holism acting up?* Even if his fortune-telling was inaccurate, Fan Tong wanted to help Luo Shi get rid of any knots inside his heart. He wanted to help out, no matter how minute it may be.

"Who is it?"

When Luo Shi discovered someone behind him and turned around, his attitude was very cautious and hostile. Realizing it was Fan Tong, he was stunned for a moment before raising his eyebrows.

"Fan Tong, why is it you again?"

"Passing by..."

"If you're passing by, why did you stop here?"

*Forcing me to talk now is it.*

Fan Tong despairingly decided to try and explain, giving it up to the heavens to decide what would spout from his mouth. Out of the blue, a chain of growling noises interrupted the hushed setting. The origin was his stomach.

Luo Shi's gaped at him with an inexplicable expression. Fan Tong paused for half a day until he finally said this one sentence.

“I was just wondering... if I could borrow some money from you for dinner...”  
A frosty wind blew by.  
Fan Tong felt that even crows cawing wouldn’t be too weird right now.

### © Fan Tong’s Afterword

After many twists and turns and experiencing things I’ve never imagined before, it seemed I have officially settled in a temporary home. Officially, yet temporarily. I know this was confusing, but that’s how things were. I’m hungry and tired. If you didn’t get it, it’s fine.

On that note, I really didn’t think I would be stomped to death by some magical beast. I never even thought of being trampled by horses or cows or dogs or cats before... What, you think cats and dogs can’t crush someone to death? People who underestimate them will one day die squashed by them. If you’re scared, my disaster-evading services are available for 500NT<sup>9</sup> each time. It’s a very reasonable price... Oh, I really have run a fortune-telling business for too long. I forgot that I don’t do that anymore. Pretend I didn’t say anything. What! Is it weird for fortune-tellers to help others avoid disasters? I’m an omnipotent, heaven-loved talent that’s invincible in everything, okay? Don’t mind the petty things!

This is terrible. My brain is empty when my stomach is empty. I’ve pretty much forgotten everything Mi Chong introduced to me today. It’s really hard to register so much information at once. If only I had a recorder and could study from it, but this place doesn’t seem like it’d have one. I can only rely on my unreliable brain. This really makes me worried.

...? I got the name wrong? Well, Mi Chong is easier to remember, plus the pronunciation’s the same anyways. He wouldn’t know. Calling it this way will aid my memory, so what’s the problem? You ask why I don’t call myself fantong<sup>10</sup>? You’re joking! What normal person can’t remember their own name! If you can find just one... hundred twenty people who can’t, I’ll start using my name backwards!

What’s the significance behind the number one hundred twenty? There’s no significance behind it of course. The number’s got no sincerity in it? Well, too bad, I’m insincere. My name sounds better backwards anyways? ...That’s going a bit too far.

Alright, I’m going to go eat now. Although I did imagine myself dying from hunger back when I did my fortune-telling business, it’s still lame to pay for my own death. A good-hearted money tree is hard to come by, so it doesn’t hurt to ask for an occasional bowl of rice or two.

...Well, I think I’ll eat a bit less. Borrowed money still has to be paid back.

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<sup>9</sup> Around \$17 USD

<sup>10</sup> The characters for Fan Tong’s name is pronounced the same as the characters for rice bucket/glutton/idiot/imbecile.

# Chapter 2

## A Human Really Should “Love Thy Neighbor”

*“Don’t come near me.” – Neighbor*

He could only drool outside the door earlier, but now he was able to sit inside for a comfortable meal. Fan Tong felt quite delighted, despite the fact that he was merely using borrowed money. At least his hunger problem was satisfied for the moment.

However, if he started his first meal with such delicious foods, how could Fan Tong go back to the “nasty and insubstantial” public rations tomorrow? The proverb, “She Ru Jian Nan<sup>11</sup>” indeed possessed a certain truth. For the good of his future, Fan Tong mustn’t develop a picky taste. He should fill his stomach with the blander and more flavorless dishes.

*Truth, my ass. That’s completely wrong.*

Tastes and preferences... that sort of thing was already decided in his previous life, right? It was not as if he never ate food before, so what he did now shouldn’t affect him anyway. Besides, he wasn’t a picky eater in his original world. Fan Tong gained a heap of money after his fortune-telling business began to thrive, but as a lazy person, he often ate quick meals thrown together from random ingredients. He made unhealthy grub, such as “Plum Powder Mixed with Potato Porridge,” “Water to Rice Ratio of 4 to 1 Porridge,” “A Bunch of Mixed Canned Stuff Porridge,” and “Leftover from Yesterday and Had Been Sitting for 15 Hours Porridge”... There were too many of meals like these to mention.

Even though the examples he listed were all types of porridges, it didn’t mean he particularly enjoyed eating them. This was simply because those were all he could cook at his skill level, and what he did make all challenged the eater’s willpower. Despite eating that kind of stuff regularly, Fan Tong felt fine. Regardless, he still survived, didn’t he...? Fan Tong suddenly had an epiphany: he might’ve discovered his cause of death. *No, right? It couldn’t have been from malnutrition... Could it?*

In any case, Fan Tong still ordered the extra-large Restaurant Special. Investing in tasteless food would be such a waste.

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<sup>11</sup> A proverb. Once one is accustomed to luxury and extravagance, it is hard to live a frugal life.



“...Did you die from hunger?”

Luo Shi sat across from him and watched him eat. Maybe this was why the other customers were gossiping whilst stealing glances in their direction.

Fan Tong didn't have to have superpowers or the like to help him discern the contents of the murmurs far away, but he could hear the people perfectly thanks to their seemingly nonexistent volume control.

“Lord Luo Shi. It's Lord Luo Shi!”

“Lord Luo Shi is eating in such a plain store, and with a white tassel, too?!” ...Perhaps from the shock of realization, the people spoke quite loudly.

*Looks like Luo Shi eating here and bringing a companion is a very rare occasion. That doesn't sound too off. Not only is he one of the five Attendants, he's the Queen's son as well. I guess he's one of those high-classed types that naturally give off an aura of indifference.*

But Luo Shi had answered his plea and lent him money for dinner. He was still a good person, Fan Tong decided.

*If that air of isolation stopped hanging about him, a pretty boy like him should be very popular, right?*

“Yes, I don't know how I died.”

After the “No” flipped to a “Yes,” a self-contradictory statement was born.

Luo Shi's expression fell cold again. Despite Luo Shi's icy gaze, Fan Tong remained focused on his food and continued to gobble up the food in his bowl.

Truthfully, there was no need for Luo Shi to follow along. He could've lent him the money and left. Was Luo Shi watching him to make sure Fan Tong used the money on food and not something else?

“Don't you find your speech weird? Your actions don't match the words you say either.”

Luo Shi raised his eyebrows in doubt. Fan Tong felt quite touched by Luo Shi's mindfulness, but he still felt a bit uneasy towards him.

*My actions don't match my words...? Is he referring to how I screamed at the Driven Fire spell, despite saying the fireball didn't hurt...?*

Regardless, Fan Tong decided to explain, since Luo Shi went out of his way to ask. Hopefully, he could redeem himself and resolve some of the misunderstandings. Perhaps this would help prevent the image of him as a hypocritical airhead from sticking as well.

“The truth is, because a wicked and nice lady blessed me after I died, ninety percent of what I say is sensible. However, sometimes words get randomly switched around. I actually feel quite happy about this situation. I have always wanted to experience something so unlucky.”

After concluding his tale, Fan Tong went over what he had said and calculated the chances of his listener understanding him.

*He probably didn't understand it. He wouldn't understand. There's no way he could understand...*

*Although the main points of the story were explained, it was probably still too hard for him to dig them out from that jumble...*

“...”

Luo Shi solemnly stared at Fan Tong with wide eyes, flustering him.

While Fan Tong wondered if Luo Shi would flip over the table in disbelief, he quickly took a few more bites of his food. Even if he were to die again, he must die full: having a last supper was very important.

But who'd have guessed that Luo Shi would suddenly burst out laughing?



“Fan Tong, what are you saying?”

From Luo Shi’s serious facial expressions, Fan Tong originally thought Luo Shi was a stern person, both inside and out. He didn’t think there were also times Luo Shi acted his age. This made him seem more human.

*He’s so cute when he smiles. If he laughed more often, he’d definitely be a bishounen everyone loves. What a shame.*

Looking around the restaurant, Fan Tong found the chattering crowds around them in awe as well. As for Luo Shi, he didn’t even notice the change in atmosphere and continued to stare at Fan Tong.

“Aren’t you being cute? I’ve never seen anyone say such nonsense so smoothly. What’d you do while you were still alive?”

It seemed Fan Tong’s explanation attempt had failed, but it did spark Luo Shi’s interest in him. That counted as a good thing, right?

“Fortune telling.”

Fan Tong took his last bite, finally gratifying his stomach.

“Fortune telling?”

Luo Shi put on an odd expression again.

“Don’t tell me you really starved to death because you had no money.”

*How rude! After I was cursed, my business thrived and everyone called me a “Master”, you know!*

“Paper...”

Fan Tong was set on justifying himself. If this continued, his personality would be questioned, his profession wouldn’t be acknowledged, and his death would be the result of some horrible miscommunication. He found that unacceptable.

Although Fan Tong didn’t know how he died and had no evidence proving he didn’t starve to death, he couldn’t accept something as shameful as dying because he couldn’t earn money.

Luo Shi didn’t understand what Fan Tong was trying to do, but he asked the manager for paper and ink out of curiosity anyways. The language form in the Eastern City corresponded with Fan Tong’s back home. Since the word reversal syndrome didn’t apply to writing, Fan Tong successfully articulated the details of his dilemma. He then passed the sheet to Luo Shi.

“Fan Tong, your calligraphy is quite beautiful.”

That first thought of Luo Shi’s left Fan Tong feeling a bit faint. No matter how nice his handwriting was, that was not the point!

“But the things you wrote sound like lies...”

*I wish they were lies too, both the fact that I got cursed and the sad reality that I came here.*

Fan Tong continued to feel helpless with a grim face. What he wrote clarified his situation, but he had no substantial proof for support.

“My dad told me that lying is a virtue, so I’m usually dishonest.”

Every time he spoke and sensed the beginnings of his words going haywire, Fan Tong wanted to stop himself before they completely run out of control. Sadly, that blasted curse came with an extra function. It forced him to finish whatever he planned to say, unless an outside force interrupted him.

“What kind of father is this? ... Wait, you said you have a word reversal problem, so if that’s how it is... Why is it so hard to listen to you? I have to change and fix everything in my head.”

Luo Shi seemed to believe Fan Tong more or less, but what was the use? Just on how bothersome it was to decipher Fan Tong’s words alone, Luo Shi might pretend he never heard the explanation. Beating Fan Tong up every time he said something wrong probably took less effort.

“Ha...”

If he always carried paper and ink with him, people wouldn’t get the wrong idea about him. However, he wasn’t mute! And more importantly, the curse would never go away if he didn’t talk!

Fan Tong wasn’t sure if the criteria of “speaking ??? sentences correctly” still stood after death, but since the curse followed, that should be the same, right? Fortunately, he could practically live forever in this world. In that way, even if he must speak three billion normal sentences consecutively, there was still hope.

“In any case, that tendency of yours is going to attract loads of unwanted trouble. I’ll look into your situation. After all, I brought you in.”

Fan Tong felt grateful for Luo Shi’s thoughtfulness. How great it was to straighten out the misunderstanding and make a new friend at the same time! Speaking of which, that was the first time he told someone about the curse. Even those who lived in his old world didn’t know of his problem.

On one hand, Fan Tong had no one close enough to say it to. On the other, he had to maintain his image as a fortune teller. It was quite saddening.

Fan Tong was now writing a question on a second sheet of paper: May I call you Luo Shi rather than “Lord” Luo Shi?

“There’s nothing wrong with it, but why do you ask?”

Fan Tong attached an extra line on a blank space.

“No matter how I think about it, there’s a high chance I’d call you ‘Scumbag’ instead.”

“...”

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With a happy belly, Fan Tong went home to rest. He wasn’t sleepy, however, and rolled in bed for a long while before he finally fell asleep. By the time he got up the next day, it was already well into the afternoon.

“What are you doing, Fan Tong?”

Even then, he’d only woken up when Mi Zhong came to visit and called for him. Only afterwards did Fan Tong realize he had missed his morning classes.

“Skipping on the first day! You’re merely a white tassel, you know. Do you really want to live your life eating government provisions?”

Fan Tong earnestly repented. The extra-large Restaurant Special last night had cost five strings, meaning he’d fallen in debt already. Accordingly, he should aim high and train hard to raise his rank, yet he had already blundered on the first day.

“It seems your neighbor next door didn’t go to class either... Really, what are you two thinking? Remember to attend the evening class, you hear me?”

Fan Tong nodded in acknowledgment. Regardless of his attitude, Mi Zhong spoke with good intentions.

Too bad he was not attentive enough. If only he had brought a set of those city giveaways... It seemed Fan Tong would starve until nightfall again.

The classes on Shufa and Fuzhou intrigued Fan Tong, but unfortunately, he had slept through both of those. Only Wushu awaited him in the evening, and he had already partially given up on that.

Mi Zhong had only registered Fan Tong yesterday and so didn't provide him with a tour of the school. Luckily, the layout of Wushu Xuan was quite simple and Fan Tong easily found his classroom. Without any further trouble, he reached his destination on time.

In reality, Fan Tong hoped that the path to class wasn't so simple. After all, this was the class he repulsed from head to toe. He even wished for the teacher to just glance at him and say, "You have no talent and there is no hope for you. You can go home now." But none of that happened, so he sat quietly and waited for class to begin.

One didn't have to rely on Wushu to make a name for himself! Fan Tong's heart exclaimed. Despite thinking this, he didn't have the guts to slam his hands down on the table, blurt out "I'm gonna ditch this shit," and strut off. Since he was here already, he might as well listen and attend. It was only a couple lessons; what could happen even if he had no talent?

Mi Zhong mentioned before that his classmates would all be New Residents, given that the school segregated them from the Natural Residents. Scanning the room from corner to corner, Fan Tong saw only scatterings of white tassels. That made him rather nervous.

As for the root of this nervousness, it was because he couldn't figure out how frequently Eastern City welcomed New Residents. If some classmates had remained here for a year or two already, didn't that suggest a high possibility that people can be stuck with white tassels for years?

Deficient Wushu ability didn't matter, but dangling a white tassel for such a long time did. As long as Fan Tong possessed a white tassel, he'd have no salary. That was horrifying no matter how he looked at it.

Although Luo Shi didn't charge him interest on the money he owed, it was quite difficult to borrow again without clearing the previous balance. He needed to maintain a good credit...

The Beginner's Class was considerably spacious. As for seats, students sat atop cushions on the floor. The teacher assigned Fan Tong to sit in the back corner, a perfect spot for snoozing. No one filled the space next to him even when class began. That seat probably belonged to his neighbor, Fan Tong presumed. He didn't think the guy would skip his evening class in addition to those morning ones he missed.

*...Could there be some reason preventing him from leaving the house? Staying inside for so long, what has he been eating? His seclusion has been long enough for someone to die...*

Fan Tong remembered what Mi Zhong told him, that some people can't recover from the shock of death. That was quite sad if it was true, Fan Tong imagined. Thinking along those lines, he decided to grab an extra portion from the street handouts tonight and drop in for a visit.

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The teacher's arrival signaled the beginning of class. Brilliant, even the teacher was a New Resident. Were Natural Residents an endangered species, or were these people really that set on segregating the two groups?

Based on his appearance, the man seemed to have died at quite an age. The fact that someone so old had died still holding grudges and regrets disturbed Fan Tong. The regrets of the elderly were abnormally unrelenting; he understood this from his various experiences during work. Those incidents made him especially sensitive towards the elderly.

Fan Tong peeked at the teacher's tassel; it was blue. Weren't blue tassels all over the streets? He thought teachers were supposed to be strong, at least red tassels... but what could he criticize, as he was still a white tassel. Nonetheless, the disparity between expectation and reality struck Fan Tong with disappointment. He quickly understood, though, why blue tassels could become teachers as soon as the teacher began to speak.

"To know Wushu, we must familiarize ourselves with its counterpart, weapons. Everyone, turn to page seventy-four and look at the section on weapons..."

This teacher was only here to teach the textbook. If he purely lectured book material, it didn't matter whether his actual skills were sufficient or not.

In reality, those truly proficient in Wushu wouldn't be teaching here in the first place.

Also, why page seventy-four? He wasn't going to start from the beginning? So people who unfortunately didn't die at the start of the semester were going to have to self-study?

*Someone, please, someone ask for fair treatment!*

Wait, textbook...?

"Our classmate sitting in the back corner, where is your textbook?"

By the time Fan Tong noticed the problem, it had been exposed.

Despite his age, the teacher's eyes remained sharp.

"Textbook..."

Fan Tong eyed the student sitting two seats from him with a puzzled look on his face. The other party eyed him back, not understanding what was wrong.

"Are you a new student? The tour guide should've given you the textbooks. You don't have them?"

Great, Mi Zhong had tricked him. Did he have to hold such a grudge towards Fan Tong for spelling his name one character off?

"If you don't have your book, go stand at the side."

Too lazy to trouble himself, the teacher penalized Fan Tong indifferently.

"Learning Wushu requires a sincere and resolute heart. You can't simply 'forget' to bring your textbook purely because it's heavy. Students, this is an example of a behavior we must not follow. Alright, let's look at page seventy-four."

He didn't even have the textbook. Where did the teacher's absurd conclusion come from? Fan Tong didn't want to argue; talking back to a teacher was never wise. He'd just obediently take his punishment.

"Equally renowned, Queen Xi Ying's Lunar Crescent Blade—Skies and Emperor Englar's Four Stringed Sword—Tian Luo Yan, are both considered godly artifacts. These weapons were passed down the generations and are exclusive to each city's ruler. They originated from the same source as the Eastern City's Aegis, Qian Huan Hua, and the Western City's Lunar Gown, Aifroa. With the support of these weapons and armors, the rulers who inherited them all possessed great combat abilities..."

Listening to the lesson wasn't particularly difficult, but Fan Tong found it somewhat tiring to continue standing. He thought it alright though, since the topic was rather interesting.

But why did the Eastern City's weapons seem to sound Western, while the other city's weapons seemed to sound Eastern... or was that his imagination?

“The Lunar Crescent Blade–Skies is renowned for its sharp edge. Likewise, Tian Luo Yan is known for its four cords that encompass four different daunting abilities.”

Fan Tong found the current subject fascinating, but the provided information was much too vague.

Was the data incomplete? The teacher had even said, “Chen Yue was originally a lake, and it came with matching godly artifacts, but we don’t know what they are.” For the teacher to dare to teach in such a manner, his level of professionalism deserved some questioning...

Fan Tong revised his inner assessment of the teacher. He wasn’t a teacher that taught the textbook. He was only here to recite it.

“Well then, I hope you will all soon discover weapons that suit each of you. Our class today concludes here.”

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Although finally relieved from his punishment, Fan Tong found yet another Wushu class lying ahead.

It was the last class of the day, but it was one that involved hands-on combat. With both legs still numb from standing, Fan Tong couldn’t rest in his next lesson either. Was this what people call a string of bad luck? He wondered.

Once class began, Fan Tong grasped the true meaning of “a string of bad luck”.

The teacher, dangling a crimson red tassel, was a sub-level stronger than Luo Shi. Noticing a new face in class, the man’s eyes lit up with excitement– as though he had found a new prey. He moved towards Fan Tong and spoke compassionately.

“We have a new student today! There’s no need for new students to attend their first class. Only, they must carry out a certain procedure.”

Did that mean he could leave early and go home? Fan Tong wondered. But in keeping with his luck up until now, that sounded a little too optimistic. Besides, the smiles of his classmates looked a bit... odd.

“You see, to know Wushu, we must conquer our fears of pain and death. That’s why, all new students, on their first day of class, must die.”

By the time the teacher finished those last words and smiled, Fan Tong was utterly dumbfounded.

*W-wait... please...*

“Students, have you been waiting long? Alright, then: get ready, get set, go!”

*I died two times already! And what’s with you stirring up the atmosphere?*

*Stop, Noooooooooo—*

Under the hands of students who’d all undergone the same initiation ceremony, of course there was no way Fan Tong could crawl back out alive.

The students assaulted him one after another until they finally killed him. In this instant, Fan Tong deemed every New Resident as a resentful spirit sated only by acts of brutality.

He couldn’t even determine which attacks they had used! Fan Tong honestly wanted to shout, but he’d already been sent towards the Pond to revive.

Not having to see the final product of his corpse mildly comforted Fan Tong. If he had become meat putty, his appetite for dinner would have disappeared.

In the end, he had used up his three freebies just like that. While waiting for his body to regenerate and float to the surface, Fan Tong felt calmer than he thought he’d be.

*Yeah right! How can I be calm? What if the purpose of those freebies were for each of the schools to murder me? By the time I finish my Shufa and Fuzhou classes, I'll owe two hundred strings!*

Fan Tong's body fully reformed while he worried about this and that. He then had to face his next problem: lack of oxygen. It was a life-threatening gamble. He held his breath until he finally reached water's surface, only to find that he was nowhere near shore.

Didn't the Wushu Xuan people send anyone to retrieve Fan Tong after killing him?

Fan Tong struggled, drinking in some mouthfuls of water before advancing a couple of meters.

*No, that joke from earlier can't be coming true, can it?* He didn't want to fill the pond with his dead bodies! ...Not to mention the cost—

In a world where dying is a dime a dozen, Fan Tong shifted his priorities to money.

*Someone, help! Help—Help—!*

Fan Tong wholeheartedly regretted not going to the Fuzhou class in the morning. If he went, he might've learned how to use that communication charm to call for a lifeline.

Stranded alone and powerless to seek help, Fan Tong would soon choke, drown, and die with his limited endurance.

After that happened, Fan Tong drowned twice more before finally realizing the solution to long distance swimming. With much effort, he clambered to shore. Gawking at the carcasses he left behind, he felt traumatized with one side of his emotions, and shed dry tears on the other...

He wasn't too clear on what "debts to increase labor market efficiency<sup>12</sup>" meant, but as for "pain being magnified by amount of money owed," he now completely understood it.

Dying already felt horrible, but now he had to experience pain when reviving, too?

*Isn't there a quick way to make some big bucks? ...Even if I must betray my body, I don't mind—*

Reeling out the water, he feared that his next move was to ask for help in his birthday suit. Thankfully, the government wasn't so inhumane as to leave him there. Despite the design flaw with the Pond being overly extensive and practically bottomless, the city still decorated the Pond's exit with springtime clothing. In other words, Fan Tong only had to walk stark naked for a short distance, from the shore to the exit. Realizing that, Fan Tong breathed a sigh of relief.

There were only three outfits hanging on the rack. *How often do they restock? If the third person here had no conscience whatsoever, the next person would be so unlucky!*

Fan Tong left the idea after a few more thoughts. It was all right as long as he was not that unlucky person. He was unlucky enough today as it was. Compared to the other things that had happened today, walking around naked now didn't seem that big a deal.

Noticing the time, Fan Tong admitted there was one good thing from this death. If he had died again, he would've missed the evening food handouts. He'd make it right on time if he set off then. That was probably the only thing worth getting excited over all day. One must find something to comfort himself with, Fan Tong thought, to convince himself that he hadn't reached the pits just yet.

A long line had already fashioned across the streets when Fan Tong arrived. It cleared quite quickly, and thankfully, nothing like "I'm deeply sorry, but we passed out the last portion

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<sup>12</sup> It is said that debts help stimulate the economy. If more money is invested, more activity occurs. So by going in debt, the government stimulates the economy. In Ye Zhi's case, it'd also be forcing the residents to stop dying and work hard.



to the person before you” happened, so he received his share after a short wait. He was even able to grab a second helping for his neighbor along the way.

*Speaking of which, weren't they doing things too casually? They didn't even ask for an I.D. when I asked to get another portion for someone else. Doesn't that mean others can happily lie and get however much they want? Or is it because this food is so tasteless that it's not missed however much is given away?*

Fan Tong cultivated these ideas in his head while he ate at home.

The food wasn't bad in that the cooks prepared them horribly, but more so because the ingredients were bad and no flavoring was added. Even if the chef's technique was amazing, the final product wouldn't get very far. They gave out food for one sole purpose: filling the stomach. Fan Tong felt like he was an animal being raised on a farm.

After he filled his stomach, it was time for Fan Tong to deliver the other serving to his neighbor and have a chat with him. He bagged the food and knocked on the doors adjoining his.

He knocked once. No reaction. He knocked again. Still no reaction.

*How odd. There had been no sounds coming from the room for the past two days, but the tour guide definitely said someone lived here!*

“Is no one here?”

When he said that, Fan Tong was appreciating the similar meanings between “Is anyone here?” and “Is no one here?” A soft but unclear voice travelled out past the door as soon after he posed the question.

The other person simply replied and gave no indications to open the doors for Fan Tong.

“...What is it?”

“I'm your neighbor. I noticed you haven't come out to eat at all, so I wanted to give you something.”

Every time he said a correct sentence, Fan Tong felt grateful, yet perplexed at the same time. It was wonderful that he spoke properly, but as always, it only happened for petty matters, which made him wonder if he should laugh or cry.

“Thank you. You can leave it at the door.”

The voice was clearer now. The person sounded very young, a young boy perhaps. The manner of speech was polite, but also gave an aloof sort of feeling.

This neighbor of his didn't reject the food, nor did he step out to receive it. He only told Fan Tong to leave it at the door. It seemed that he disliked contact with other people.

“You're not coming out to take it?”

“No... It's a bit inconvenient for me right now... I'm truly sorry. I know this is rude of me, but thank you for your kindness.”

*From his manners, he should be a well-behaved child who had received proper education. As for what was inconveniencing the boy, Fan Tong had no idea.*

*Disabled? Not feeling well? Too ugly?*

Fan Tong considered some thoughts in the next couple of moments after the encounter. *If people had missing arms and legs during their previous life, are they still limbless after coming here? Or do they grow new ones?*

He hadn't even seen the person's face, and they couldn't even be considered as acquaintances. So naturally, Fan Tong didn't intend to intrude on his neighbor's privacy. In turn, he placed the food down and asked a few more questions before leaving.

“I heard that you haven't attended school since the year started. Are you not going tomorrow?”

He wanted to ask if he was going to school tomorrow, but as long as it made sense.

“Ah? ...A year? School?”

It appeared that what Fan Tong had said either surprised or shocked the youth. Hearing his reaction, Fan Tong felt somewhat sorry for him.

*Was his death so traumatizing that he couldn't remember anything the tour guide said? He's only a child. It must have been hard on him.*

“White tassels are truly good, no, I meant they're very good. No, very bad. You can only raise your status if you don't go to school... I mean, you need to go to school. Since you're already here, why don't you just give up on life? Please ignore what I just said. I'm saying, why don't we go to school together tomorrow?”

He was hoping that the youth might consider stepping out of his house if he had a companion. Unfortunately, the jumbling characteristic of his words sounded more and more foreign as he spoke. Though the last part finished all right, he was still fairly worried about whether the boy understood him or not.

“...Hn?”

*He probably didn't.*

“Anyways, I'll come pick you up tomorrow. Don't refuse.”

...He originally planned to say “Please consider it.” Wasn't changing it into “Don't refuse” stretching it a bit?

“Okay. I understand. Thank you.”

The other party knew he invited him with good intentions. Great! Half his goal for this voyage had been passably fulfilled. He only had one last thing to ask.

“What's your name?”

He thought this was an easy question, but the person remained silent for a long time. Fan Tong was ready to leave when he heard the youth's subdued response.

“Yue Tui. Call me Yue Tui.”

“Mm.”

*A unique name as well, but still better than something like Mi Chong.*

The boy didn't ask for Fan Tong's name after replying and fell silent again, as though he didn't even possess an ounce of interest. Fan Tong couldn't determine if his socializing attempt was a success or a failure.

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Networking. Fan Tong found it essential.

If one remained a loner, not only would he find it hard to survive in society, but would also have problems being lonely and bored. If one had no family, one must at least have friends. Enemies could be omitted, since they were only there to lower the chances of survival.

He didn't manage his relationships properly in the old world... or rather, his network was overly complex. Too many people went in and out of his store...

Just by seeing how he ate “Plum Powder Mixed with Potato Porridge,” “Water to Rice Ratio of 4 to 1 Porridge,” “A Bunch of Mixed Canned Stuff Porridge,” and “Leftover from Yesterday and Has Been Sitting for 15 Hours Porridge,” for years without anyone stopping him, one can guess the quality of his social life.

*I want friends! I want companions! I want people to do things with! I want to complain to someone about my curse!*

Fan Tong chanted the slogan in his mind. He didn't have the confidence to validate Luo Shi as a friend yet. As for Mi Zhong... he'd reconsider him after Mi Zhong brings back the textbooks and apologizes.

He felt a connection between him and his neighbor. Though they hadn't gotten closer to one another yet, but as they were both white tassels, he felt that they could get along with little difficulty. Not to mention, they might be roommates soon. A friend was better than a stranger or an enemy any day.

He heard that this neighbor had holed up in his room since arriving and hadn't gotten in contact with anyone or anything in the Eastern City. Did this mean he still had those three free revivals? Well, if he stayed in his room the entire time, he shouldn't have encountered any danger.

Fan Tong felt both envious of and sad for Yue Tui upon thinking this.

*Wait. He might've been that poor guy who died from the city sign falling on him. That might have traumatized him, making him unable to leave the house. Something like that happening isn't too odd.*

*Plus, he never leaves to get food. What if he starves and dies, but just comes right back after reviving? Then that cycle repeats and he's actually bombarded with debt right now!*

Understanding the discourtesy of guessing someone else's life, Fan Tong capped his thoughts and promptly went to bed.

The next morning, before Fan Tong was awake, Mi Zhong visited.

"Fan Tong--! I can't believe I forgot to give you the textbooks yesterday! I'm so sorry!"

With Mi Zhong's extravagant hollering barging into his home, Fan Tong woke with shock. He was ready to forgive Mi Zhong seeing his frantic manner, but when he noticed Mi Zhong pulling out not only textbooks for Wushu Xuan, but for Shufa Xuan and Fuzhou Xuan as well, he wanted to give him a good beating.

He actually forgot all the textbooks--! If it wasn't for the fact that he overslept and missed his Shufa and Fuzhou classes, then wouldn't he have been in serious trouble?

"Fan Tong, how was class yesterday? You only died once during the hands-on combat class, right?"

Fan Tong's expression twisted into a scowl.

"You knew they'd kill me and yet you didn't tell me..."

If he had said something wrong, he'd definitely destroy the presence of his anger. How nice of the curse to not prank him now.

"This is custom! This is tradition! Everyone who attends class must die, plus--"

Mi Zhong extended that last note and enthusiastically continued.

"I died too! How can I let anyone else get away with it."

It seemed that that was his main point.

"But the problem is, I know how to swim, so I drowned and died two more times!"

"You know how to swim, yet you still drowned? You're amazing."

*No!*

"Alright! I've given you the textbooks now, so quickly learn how to communicate using Fuzhou. Find me when you can. I need to go to my classes now..."

"Wait, does the person next door have his books?"

"Hm? He should've gotten them when he first arrived, right? It depends where he put them."

Sigh, so he must use his broken speech system and somehow guide Yue Tui into finding his textbooks?

“Be good and go to school. Strengthen your connections with the other classmates. The best is that you find yourself a backer. Making the teacher like you works too.”

Mi Zhong patted Fan Tong’s shoulders, delivering the suggestion somewhat heedlessly. *I understand this without you telling me*, Fan Tong thought. But with that mouth of his, it’d be a bit difficult to obtain much positive result.

Just a bit? Was it really just a bit?

“I’ll be leaving now. Don’t be late...”

“Wait!”

“What is it?”

“I don’t have to live for the Shufa and Fuzhou classes too, do I?”

After dying, he would live again in the Pond. The reversed sentence isn’t wrong either.

“Don’t worry. Only the Wushu Xuan is that barbaric... But after our conversation earlier, haven’t you realized that even if you do have to die, I wouldn’t tell you?”

“...”

Fan Tong secretly decided. If he performed well in school, he’d definitely challenge Mi Zhong before leaving the white tassel rank.

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There was still time to explore and probe the campus before the beginning of class. Going after breakfast would make perfect timing, but for food like that, he didn’t mind missing a meal or two—he found eating that food three times a day overboard. So he studied his textbooks for a bit, and then walked over to Yue Tui’s room. There was still plenty of time.

“Ah, sorry, could you wait for me a little longer? I’m not ready...”

The youth apologized soon after Fan Tong knocked on the door. It wasn’t clear what he was still getting ready for.

If he were a girl putting on makeup, waiting a couple minutes wouldn’t be a problem, but since he’s a boy... Fan Tong did his fair share of thinking and criticizing, but he ultimately remained waiting outside.

A minute passed. Five minutes passed. It seemed as though ten had passed as well.

*Just what is he doing?...*

“Yue Tui, are you not ready?”

“...Sorry, I encountered some problems.”

The boy’s voice sounded disheartened, even a bit despondent. Fan Tong couldn’t help wondering what problem someone can have so early in the morning, at home.

Weak knees and can’t get out of bed? Too attached to home?

“Can’t I help you with it?”

As long as the reversed sentence reasonably matched his intention, Fan Tong didn’t mind.

“I don’t really understand how to wear these clothes...”

Fan Tong felt a bit speechless at the sudden notice.

“As for clothes, can’t you just casually strip them? Why are you taking this so seriously?...”

*Changing “casually wear them” into “casually strip them”... That sounded a bit perverted.*

“No, how can I go out in messy attire? That’s not right.”

The youth appeared abnormally stubborn about the issue. The problem was, though, if Fan Tong let him continue as was, neither of them would make it to school.

Why couldn’t he wear the clothes? Could he be a young master of sorts in his previous life, so his servants dressed him every day? But for something as simple as putting on clothes, shouldn’t anyone have the common sense to do that?

“Yue Tui, I’m coming in.”

“Ugh...”

The youth probably wanted to stop Fan Tong, but was too slow, so he only had time to make a short sound. As such, he decided to speak no further. Upon coming in, Fan Tong finally saw his neighbor’s appearance, and was dazed for a few seconds as a result.

The boy actually had put on the clothes already, but was holding onto a belt and buckle-like object, not knowing what to do. Seeing Fan Tong, he smiled, embarrassed.

What dazed Fan Tong weren’t Yue Tui’s picturesque features or his unexpectedly young age. He was dazed by the youth’s golden hair and sky blue eyes.

He heard that both cities battled to snatch New Residents, but this was the first time in the Eastern City that he saw a Westerner.

Yue Tui was a tad older than Luo Shi. Luo Shi was fourteen, and he wouldn’t be older than fifteen or sixteen. The fact dampened Fan Tong’s spirits. A young, well-bred, and well-educated boy died at such an age, and even fit Chen Yue’s criteria to come here. Just what had happened to him?

“Excuse me, but could you tell me where do I wear this?” Yue Tui asked. Without the door acting as a barrier, his voice was much clearer. Fan Tong felt the gods were unfair when they created humans. Some people seemed to have everything: a nice face, a nice aura, and a nice voice.

“Waist.”

“I tie it around my waist?”

“No.”

Fan Tong replied with his voice out of habit again, which caused Yue Tui, who was about to tie it, to stop in his tracks.

“No? Then where do I wear it?”

“Waist.”

Fan Tong felt he was messing with the boy with his responses. Yu Tui also put on a troubled expression, unsure of what to say.

Continuing the misunderstanding would be fruitless, but thankfully, Fan Tong had the explanation note he’d written for Luo Shi with him. He pulled out the piece of paper and handed it to Yue Tui. Wondering what it was for, Yue Tui accepted the note, but his expression remained troubled after seeing its contents.

“I’m... not familiar with the written characters of the Eastern City. I don’t really understand...”

A miscalculation.

Fan Tong should’ve known written communication wouldn’t work for a Westerner... He heard that spoken words were understood by everyone due to Chen Yue’s power. As for his writing style, the script he used just so happened to match the city’s...

*Then what language does Yue Tui use? English? He couldn’t be from the same world as me, right?*

Speaking in English coupled with his word reversal syndrome was asking too much from him. At his English level, he'd translate "How are you" into "Why is it you?", and "How old are you?" into "Why is it always you?" Why did that sound like a certain joke<sup>13</sup> he heard before? At that point, he didn't even get what was so funny about it.

"You can just wear it the way I am."

"Ah... Thank you."

Yue Tui seemed to be a well-mannered person. He didn't question what the previous responses were about and went on to fix his clothing.

"Textbooks..."

Fan Tong pointed at his own textbooks to remind Yue Tui to bring them. Seeing Yue Tui's expression, he presumed the boy had left the books somewhere and forgot about them.

"Even if I find them, I won't be able to read them."

Yue Tui sounded mildly crestfallen saying this.

"But if you don't bring them, you'll be forced to sit as punishment."

*What does being "forced to sit as punishment" even mean? To think the curse had the nerve to say something so absurd...*

"That's alright. I'll keep trying. I should ask to see if there's a language class for the Eastern City."

If he wanted to learn the language, that was a sign he was starting to take control of his life and live anew, right?

That was a good outcome. After Fan Tong made an effort to correctly ask Yue Tui whether he wanted breakfast, Fan Tong found that the youth also found the rations unpalatable from his disgusted facial expression. They then left the house together and strode towards the school campus.

They stood under dim indoor lighting earlier, but now that they were under the sun, Fan Tong especially noticed Yue Tui's radiance.

This definitely wasn't a biased perception. Numerous pedestrians turned their heads to look at Yue Tui. Fan Tong counted to himself: since the beginning of their walk until now, twenty-eight turned out of the thirty they had passed by. That was a head-turning rate of over ninety percent!

Although also a youth with delicate features, Yue Tui felt vastly different from Luo Shi. Fan Tong couldn't determine where exactly they differed, but from that solemn vibe Yue Tui subconsciously emitted while he walked quietly, Fan Tong wouldn't think he was so young if not for his yet adolescent appearance.

Due to his social position, Luo Shi forced himself to mature early, but that was still a different feeling.

"Yue Tui, how old are you?"

"Fifteen, almost sixteen."

Only after replying was Yue Tui reminded of something.

"I forgot to ask you for your name..."

"I'm Fan Tong."

"Nice to meet you, Fan Tong."

He certainly wasn't familiar with the language. He didn't link Fan Tong's name with anything else.

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<sup>13</sup> This is a Chinese Pun that didn't translate well into English. The character 怎么 for 'how' also can mean 'why' and the character 老 for 'old' also can mean 'always,' thus resulting in these twisted, comical questions.

They entered the campus doors and asked a couple of quick questions to the people inside. They all replied similarly. Since Yue Tui was also a white tassel, it was fine if he attended the same classes as Fan Tong. As for language classes, one person said the school usually passes out books for self-studying. If he had any problems, he could ask his friends around campus.

It was as if the city left you stranded after grabbing you here. But Yue Tui said nothing and seemed to accept the arrangement, so Fan Tong didn't have any further opinions.

Fan Tong only remembered to check the timetable right before entering the classroom. His eyes almost popped out of their sockets while he read it. The schedule for the day had changed. The first class today was that deadly Wushu combat class.

And by deadly, he wasn't exaggerating. It was an accurate depiction. Undeniably, Fan Tong had died, and today, Yue Tui was the new student. If he brought him in now, chances are he wouldn't survive.

"Uhm, Yue Tui. Why don't you skip this first class? I mean, let's go to Wushu class."

If he didn't attend class today, he'd still be a newcomer tomorrow. The best bet was to give up on the subject altogether, but with that second sentence flipped, Yue Tui couldn't understand what Fan Tong meant.

"...? Of course we're going to class."

"No, what I meant to say is, the students and teachers are all very friendly. You'll die if you go in."

His words became more disarrayed as he became progressively nervous. *Friendly? Really?* Changing the adjective to this term irritated him.

"...? Fan Tong, I really don't understand what you're try to get at."

*This is my fault. No need for you to apologize. The important part is that you don't step into that room. I'm not as heartless as Mi Zhong. I don't have a fetish of seeing a bishounen getting XXX'ed to his death!*

"Anyways, go to class!"

"Okay. I know. The classroom is this one, right?"

Fan Tong despaired at his uselessness.

Should he outright drag Yue Tui away? He didn't want to attend class either, so it'd be two birds with one stone.

"Oh hey— We have a new student again! Come in."

Unfortunately, the beast of a teacher with a human façade had already opened the door. He shined a harmless smile at Yue Tui, luring him into his trap. Fan Tong could only follow behind as Yue Tui walked in. His scalp tingling as he imagined what would happen next.

### © Fan Tong's Afterword

It seemed that many things have happened just in these few days since I've arrived.

Hmmm— I became a debtor right after becoming a member of the city. With the New Residents in debt, they can send us to do petty jobs here and there. The government seems to be exercising the system to generate a free labor force.

Although I deftly uncovered the Eastern City's scheme, I still can't do much about it. I see darkness in my future. Not to mention, I'm quite worried about how painful a rebirth with two-hundred strings of debt would be... Can I borrow two hundred from Luo Shi again? But I didn't even return those five yet. Asking for forty times as much all of a sudden, he might blow up at me...

Ah, I'm still unfamiliar with everything in the city. The neighbor who I can hang out with seems to know even less. And that tour guide who does know his way around doesn't look very trustworthy. Who can I depend on?

I need someone to bring me clothes when I climb out of the Pond at least!

I'd do the same! I'll also haul the person out when they die! I need to train my boat-rowing skills first... but I'm sincere! Even if I rowed until the boat toppled over, I'd drown with the guy! That's friendship!

If I can, I really don't want to leave this lame job to Luo Shi... He's still one of the five Attendants and is probably quite busy. Plus, he's a Natural Resident, so he won't die and can't die. He won't float back up from the waters if he did, and I won't have the chance to repay him or salvage him with my boat. I'd owe him more and more. In the end, how could I compensate him?

...Hmm. Crafting all these thoughts, am I just trying to avoid thinking about what's going to happen next?

Yue Tui, should I pray for you? Is it too late to learn how to row a boat now?



# Chapter 3

## Having a White Tassel Doesn't Mean I'm Weak

*"But being a white tassel means you have no money. Face reality, Fan Tong." – Luo Shi*

"Everyone, we have another new student to welcome today. Aren't you all incredibly excited?"

The Wushu combat teacher nonchalantly asked, grinning.

*What welcome? Why don't you honestly admit that there's a new student here for everyone to squash? You look the happiest out of everyone here!*

Fan Tong secretly decided to call him 'Tractor Teacher.'

"Well then, let's explain our classroom rules to the new student, or has Fan Tong already informed you?"

Fan Tong shook his head, glancing worriedly at Yue Tui's direction. Yue Tui had also detected the strange atmosphere and slightly knitted his brows.

Fan Tong really wanted to help him, but he was powerless against such gang violence...

"The first lesson all new students must learn is to become accustomed to death. Learning Wushu will be astoundingly easier after achieving a fearless attitude."

Tractor Teacher smiled. Fan Tong considered this to be broken logic, and Yue Tui didn't accept the ideology with open arms either.

"Everyone died before coming here, Teacher."

Usually, new students became dumbstruck upon hearing the teacher's words and couldn't react. Very rarely did people rebut the way Yue Tui did, but still, his reasoning would not spare him from the "Newcomer's Welcoming Ceremony."

"You'll only get used to death after experiencing it multiple times. Plus, this is a rare entertainment for our fellow classmates."

*You said it! In the end, you actually said it!*

While Fan Tong was going crazy over the teacher's outrageous remark, Tractor Teacher decided against allowing Yue Tui to debate further. He waved his hand momentarily, and then positioned it in the same way that Fan Tong had seen the day before.

“Let's not waste time, everyone. No need to count down this time. Go-!”

Fan Tong was perturbed by Tractor Teacher's enthusiastic tone. He closed his eyes, unwilling to witness the forthcoming murder.

Obviously, he didn't participate in the bloodbath. All he could do was shut his eyes, though that didn't protect him from hearing the sounds of clashing weapons, beatings, and everyone's horrified screams... *Huh?*

Everyone's horrified screams? Something seemed off here.

Fan Tong opened his eyes, and saw a baffled Tractor Teacher with his jaw dropping in speechlessness at the masses of grumbling students fumbling across the floor.

Yue Tui stood there without a wrinkle on his shirt.

The conclusion had exceeded everyone's expectations.

“Next time...”

He made no particular expression, and smiled reservedly.

“I will kill every one of you.”

Simply a reserved smile; his voice was neither loud nor soft.

Even Tractor Teacher failed to utter a sound at this declaration. Everyone saw the change in the youth's gaze.

Defeating a bunch of whites wouldn't determine his skill level, but instilling fear into a red tasseled teacher changed everything.

“Teacher, is there still class today?”

In an instant, Yue Tui reverted back to his previous gentle and polite manner, as if his peculiar aura was all but an illusion, as if it had never existed.

However, those wounded students were solid proof of the reality that had occurred.

“No, what can I even teach you? Class dismissed, class dismissed! If you have time, go boost your rank and transfer to another class, alright? Seriously...”

*Class dismissed? That includes me, right?*

Tractor Teacher had already lost interest in messing with the newcomers and waved his hand, signaling them to do as they liked. He then used his Fuzhou Communicator, calling for backup to clean up the people still stuck on the floor.

As for whether he brought them to the hospital or simply killed them all for efficiency, Fan Tong didn't know.

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The Wushu combat class unexpectedly ended early and the Wushu literary class hadn't yet started, so naturally, Fan Tong and Yue Tui spent passing period on their own. Yue Tui came to a standstill at the Wushu Xuan's center garden, so Fan Tong, who was following, stopped as well.

Fan Tong's mind whirled and the thoughts within whirled about, including how he “should have dragged Yue Tui to class yesterday, then the tragedy of a poor boy drowning twice after being murdered wouldn't have happened” and other similar regrets. He didn't come out of his thoughts until Yue Tui called his name.

“Fan Tong, you actually wanted to tell me not to go to class earlier, right? Thank you.”

*Whoa, how did you know?*

Fan Tong was quite shocked seeing Yue Tui thank him so wholeheartedly.

“Are you... the type that says things wrong when nervous? I think I understand.”



What Yue Tui said made Fan Tong wide-eyed.

Yue Tui misunderstood, but it wasn't as if Fan Tong could clarify. At least now Yue Tui wouldn't take his words as seriously. Though, wouldn't Fan Tong have to appear nervous all the time then?

"Yue Tui. You're so weak. Have you been training since you were young?"

Since Yue Tui assumed he said things incorrectly when nervous anyways, Fan Tong decided he might as well use that broken speech of his as much as he pleased. He'd leave it to Yue Tui to translate.

Despite holding a white tassel and never receiving any instruction from Eastern City, Yue Tui still beat all of those students. This sort of power, Fan Tong guessed, he had gained in his previous life and simply carried it over.

How odd. Wasn't Yue Tui a young master who couldn't even put on his own clothes? Since when did young masters like him ever start learning martial arts? What world was he living in that while even a fortune teller like Fan Tong wouldn't bother learning any self-defense to protect his stall, someone who should have plenty of bodyguards possessed such skill in combat? Or had Fan Tong simply been lazy?

"Yeah..."

Yue Tui appeared slightly sullen when he replied, perhaps recalling some sort of memory.

"Yue Tui. Please don't go to school with me ever again!"

Fan Tong patted Yue Tui's shoulders and articulated his words with beaming seriousness.

"...You mean you want me to go with you, right? If not, the words you said don't match your actions at all..."

If Fan Tong responded with a "No" at this point, he'd definitely confuse Yue Tui. Hence, he prudently nodded his head.

"And yes, I'd like go to school with you. I have some things to ask you about as well... that I'd like clarified."

Didn't the tour guide explain everything to him when he arrived? Did he only come to his senses now?

Things he needed to ask... that meant Fan Tong had to act as a substitute tour guide? Wasn't the difficulty level for this a bit high? Could Yue Tui really rely on the gibberish that came out of his mouth?

"Sure, but there's something that's not important I don't have to tell you beforehand."

What Fan Tong must tell Yue Tui is, of course, something he regarded as important. As for the errors in his speech, Fan Tong decided to ignore them.

"If your body dies before it reaches its ten year limit, you have to pay after your third death! White tassels have no salary, so they'll go into debt, which in turn forces them into manual labor to work that debt off. Not to mention, you have to experience pain whenever you regenerate! Because I died three times tomorrow, I already owe five hundred strings!"

When everything flowed smoothly in the beginning, Fan Tong secretly rejoiced. Sadly, the curse didn't cut him slack for long. It even cleverly added the rebirth fees of his "three deaths tomorrow." Fan Tong didn't know whether to laugh or cry.

"Fan Tong, don't be nervous. Take your time speaking."

Now Yue Tui was patting Fan Tong's shoulders. How could he let him know this was not an anxiety problem?

"I also hope I can go salvage you when you die."

The you's and me's had swapped, completely changing the meaning.

“Hm? I can swim by myself, but if you want to retrieve me, I’d be very happy...”

*I want you to retrieve me —! Your probability of dying cannot be higher than mine.*

“I’m glad to have met you, Fan Tong. You’re a really nice person. I’ve been living alone in the Eastern City, so all this time I wasn’t sure of what to do...”

When Yue Tui gently smiled and said the words, Fan Tong couldn’t bring himself to say anything back.

*Dad. Mom. I’ve been given the Nice Guy Card. Why can’t the other person be a cute girl? Plus, I didn’t even confess...*

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Fan Tong and Yue Tui arrived on time and sat in their seats for the start of their next lesson.

Because Yue Tui didn’t bring any textbooks, Fan Tong became a bit worried he’d be bullied by the teacher, but as reality proved, his worries were for naught.

“That student over there, did you not bring your textbooks?”

Weird. It was the exact same teacher, but why was his tone so much more amicable and affectionate?

“Teacher, I lost them and haven’t applied for new ones yet.”

Not being able to find them and losing them produced the same result, so Yue Tui said it this way.

“Is that right... that student in the next seat, the one who didn’t bring his books yesterday, share with him, alright? You must take care of your fellow classmates.”

...Hey.

*What is this difference in treatment? The one who looks better is favored and better liked? But teacher, you’re male, aren’t you? Shouldn’t a man feel a sense of rivalry towards other men who look better than him? Shouldn’t they see each other as rivals despite the fact that no conflict has occurred yet? Why is your reaction so off from the usual situation? From now on, you’re named the Biased Teacher!*

Though Fan Tong felt offended and wanted to dispute, he didn’t feel wronged when Yue Tui scooted over to share his textbook.

According to a lousy novel he had randomly picked up when he had nothing to do, this was a scenario people referred to as “You say you don’t want it, but your body is honest<sup>14</sup>.” *Oh well, it isn’t important if I said differently, since this isn’t what’s important anyways.*

“Today, we’ll explain weapons. Everyone flip to page seventy-four.”

*Biased Teacher, didn’t we do page seventy-four yesterday? Do you want to be renamed as Alzheimer’s Teacher? Or Slacker Teacher?*

“Equally renowned, Queen Xiying’s Lunar Crescent Blade – Skies and Emperor Englar’s Four Stringed Sword – Tian Luo Yan, are both considered godly artifacts. These weapons were passed down the generations and are exclusive to each city’s ruler. They originated from the same source as the Eastern City’s Aegis, Qian Huan Hua<sup>15</sup>, and the Western City’s Lunar Gown, Aifroa. With the support of these weapons and armors, the rulers who inherited them all

<sup>14</sup> A Chinese idiom that originated from Japanese anime/porn flicks. It’s literally translated here, but the phrase can also be used to describe tsundere characters.

<sup>15</sup> Meaning a thousand illusions or fantasies.

possessed great combat abilities. Our Queen Xiying bears a pure black tassel, an indication of the highest level..."

Fan Tong looked left and right. The students were the same as yesterday's, so he didn't run into the wrong room. There was no A or B class, so that wasn't the problem either.

Then, why wasn't anyone correcting the teacher?

"The Lunar Crescent Blade-Skies is renowned for its sharp edge. Likewise, Tian Luo Yan is known for its four cords that encompass four different daunting abilities. As for the aegis Qian Huan Hua..."

*It's the same lesson twice, and it's the plain ol' direct passage reading both times. Isn't anyone bored?*

"Fan Tong, what is it?"

Yue Tui noticed his expression and quietly mumbled the question.

"We offered this class yesterday."

Fan Tong also replied softly. He had already decided to simply let Yue Tui decode anything he said on his own.

"Huh?"

Before Yue Tui said much more, Biased Teacher opened his mouth.

"Students, don't talk amongst yourselves. There're new students who haven't learnt the lesson, so those who have must listen again. Then we can all be on the same page. Understand?"

*What one-sided logic is this? If you really wanted to take care of the newcomers, shouldn't you start from page one?*

Out of curiosity, Fan Tong flipped to the beginning and checked the contents. Right on the first flip, he saw some handwritten text plastered across the first page.

"Everything before page seventy-three is a biography of the author. Also, as long as there's a new student, you have to start over from page seventy-four. If you want to learn this subject, you better read the book yourself."

The writer of the note was Mi Chong. How considerate of him...

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The thing called lunch, if the two of them wanted to eat, they'd have to eat public rations. "I'm not very hungry. I think I can go on until dinner."

So said Yue Tui. Fan Tong thought Yue Tui was pushing himself a bit, but to be honest, he wanted to do the same.

Food that'd destroy his appetite upon thinking about it, having it once a day was enough.

His stomach felt a little unsettled as he went to class without eating breakfast, but thinking about how he'd learn about Shufa next, which he had never been in contact with before, Fan Tong lightened up and pretended his body was in perfect condition.

The architecture in Shufa Xuan inclined towards a glamorous style. The classroom divisions were more complex than those of Wushu Xuan's, but one could notice a pattern after walking around a bit. During the search for the correct classroom, all passing students stared at Yue Tui. Fan Tong presumed this was something that'd continue to happen.

Yue Tui seemed very used to the onlookers' gazes and showed no reaction indicating his discomfort. At the same time, Fan Tong saw Shufa students practicing an assortment of miraculous spells. Thinking about how he'd be able to do these things after taking the class, Fan Tong's mood instinctively brightened.

“Hah...”

On Fan Tong's first lesson, his teacher glanced once at him and sighed.

“You have no talent and there is no hope for you. You can go home now.”

“...”

The one sentence he prayed for so earnestly in Wushu Xuan was in fact bestowed upon him in Shufa Xuan. Surely, that brought down his spirits completely.

Especially when the teacher enthusiastically turned to Yue Tui after sighing at him and passionately gripped Yue Tui's hands, his heart fell even lower.

“Ho! A genius that is found only once in a hundred years! How many generations of luck the Eastern City must have had to get a New Resident like you! When the time comes, don't forget this teacher of yours, alright!”

Humans would die if they constantly compared themselves with one another<sup>16</sup>. Why must Yue Tui be a treasure and he a block of rotten wood?

The teacher could see talent at one glance? Fan Tong refused to believe it. He'd definitely be able to learn Shufa! Even if he couldn't learn as fast as Yue Tui, as long as he put in the effort, there'd be results!

Thus, Fan Tong awarded him with the label Blind Teacher, although the name did include a few parts of Fan Tong's discontent to it.

“Students. Look at the textbooks you're holding. Can you see the Shufa energy flowing on it?”

Everyone in the room lowered their heads to look, including Fan Tong.

...Great, he saw nothing. Wasn't it just a regular ol' book? Was this a prank? Like the Emperor's new clothes? How only smart people could see the clothes and no one else could. But in reality, he was just naked...

“Yue Tui, what energy is flowing?”

“Hm? It's right here.”

Yue Tui pointed at the book Fan Tong was holding.

“Gradually, starting here, the line of energy writes out... words, I'm assuming? But I don't understand the Eastern City's language. It should look like this if I copied it.”

Yue Tui traced his fingers across the imprints he saw. Fan Tong became silent again.

“See one line, you are in. See two lines, you win. See three lines, you're a genius. See no lines, go home now!”

Even the textbook discriminated against him, but that wasn't what was important. What was the meaning behind placing that on the fourth line? Was it because people normally couldn't see the lines, so they used it to joke around? If seeing three lines made one a genius, what did seeing the fourth mean? Or was the one joking with him Yue Tui? But Yue Tui didn't understand the Eastern City's word form!

“Fan Tong, what do these words mean?”

Yue Tui also had his fair share of interest in knowing what the hidden words on the book meant, so he asked him.

Without doubt it was an innocent question, but he still felt his heart being stabbed ...

“It's just saying that the people who can see the lines are really dumb, hahaha.”

Thanks to the curse, it made him sound like a jealous sour plum saying the opposite thing on purpose.

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<sup>16</sup>人比人氣死人. ren bi ren qi si ren. This Chinese idiom is literally translated here. The closet English comparison would probably be “Comparisons are odious.”

“Fan Tong... relax.”

Yue Tui patted his shoulders and faintly sighed, but Fan Tong still heard it regardless.  
*I can't see it even if I am relaxed! I can't accept this—*

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After a class of Shufa, Yue Tui could already perform some telekinesis while Fan Tong remained in his “Regular Joe” position.

Could it be because he was a commoner his past life, he'd have to remain a common ghost after death as well?

No, more importantly, he had already given up on getting any results for Wushu, and it had been determined he had no chance in Shufa. That meant Fuzhou was his last hope! If that didn't work, didn't it mean he'd forever stay a white tassel and eternally earn no money?

After the setback from Shufa Xuan, Fan Tong felt discouraged and utterly anxious. The reality that Fuzhou was his last hope made him even more restless as he stepped onto the Fuzhou Xuan's grounds. Of course, escaping reality helped no one. He'd eventually have to go to class to see if he was capable, but only on the precondition that he can reach the classroom.

The layout of Wushu Xuan leaned towards simplicity and Shufa Xuan's toward elaboration and intricacy. Fuzhou Xuan, on the other hand, could be called a labyrinth.

Yes, not just a maze, but a huge maze. Charms, both working ones and student experimental ones, were stuck in all directions. It looked exactly like a huge maze undergoing some sort of exorcism ritual.

As for the “huge” part, that was because Fuzhou Xuan was filled with different dimensions as well as illusions created by the charms. For instance, you'd crash into a wall where there was clearly a road, but when there was a wall, you could pass right through it...

Finding one's classroom in this delusive place truly wasn't easy. Fan Tong was an amateur in deciphering the charms, and Yue Tui couldn't even read the characters on the papers. Wandering around lost for some time, they were about to be late.

When one was powerless, he should ask for help. But Fan Tong's luck tended to be dreadful. Even when he attempted asking, he'd end up talking to fake human mannequins created by Fuzhou. Maybe that was a talent in its own right.

*It's time to give up on Fuzhou Xuan. Why don't you just accept your fate?*

*No! How can I just give up like this!*

They had already drifted to a place with no humans in sight whatsoever. Finding their way back had also become a puzzle. The problem morphed from “Will they be late to class?” to “Will they be trapped in here forever without anyone finding them and die?” Above all, Yue Tui was here with him. When the time came, there'd still be no one to salvage him. That was just...

Right then, a cord was struck and Fan Tong was enlightened. The many regulations on rebirths were set in hopes that New Residents wouldn't take dying too casually, huh?

If someone committed suicide whenever they got lost, that'd be too terrible.

He had thought those thoughts, but truthfully, he was considering suicide right about then. He could start over from the main doors... But, even if he had the heart to bear an extra hundred strings to his debt, in addition to the two hundred strings worth of pain during regeneration, there'd be no point as class would have already ended by the time he came back.

Then at this moment, he suddenly heard a familiar and incomparably heartwarming voice.

“Fan Tong? How'd you get all the way here?”



Luo Shi walked up to him while giving him an odd look.

"Also, what did you do yesterday? I saw the records. Why do you have a two hundred string debt all of a sudden? You died three times?"

Luo Shi really cared for him. He even looked at the records to check up on him, thought Fan Tong. Fan Tong felt pampered and surprised.

"I didn't come to school to go to class."

"It's such a hassle to understand you... huh?"

While Luo Shi looked annoyed and complained, he suddenly noticed Yue Tui standing behind Fan Tong. His entire expression changed.

In the time Fan Tong had blinked his eyes, Luo Shi had already zapped to Yue Tui and was clutching his arms fervidly.

"Hui Shi!"

Hm?

Fan Tong was baffled for a second.

Did he just hear an incredibly alarming name?

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While Fan Tong was still recovering from the bewilderment, Luo Shi's words also shocked Yue Tui and rendered him incapable of responding. Luo Shi gaped at him for a couple extra seconds before releasing his hands in disappointment.

"No..."

No. Not Hui shi. They only looked alike. But he wasn't Hui Shi.

Actually, Hui Shi probably wouldn't come back anymore, right? Maybe there was some accident, maybe something happened.

Everyone had assumed this for a long time. Only he refused to accept it.

"Luo Shi, are you alright?"

Fan Tong asked considerately, as he saw the Luo Shi's expression changing from his excitement earlier to a grim silence now. He didn't look alright.

"...It's nothing. You are?"

Luo Shi quickly answered Fan Tong and looked towards Yue Tui to investigate his identity.

"Yue Tui, I'm Fan Tong's friend."

Yue Tui answered with a soft smile. Fan Tong who stood nearby felt touched during this instant.

Fan Tong's friend, Fan Tong's friend, Fan Tong's friend.

This was the first time in his entire life someone proclaimed to be his friend!

Sigh, actually, as he'd already been transported from his original world to Huan Shi, this meant that this would be the first time in both lives combined...

"Fan Tong's friend?"

Luo Shi made a face and eyed Fan Tong suspiciously.

"When did you make a friend? You were able to with that speech tendency of yours? How did you cheat him into this?"

*You don't have to be this suspicious, right? Do we hold a grudge against each other? Or do you want to be my only friend?*

"Ugh, Yue Tui, he is..."

Recalling the fact that Yue Tui's knowledge about the Eastern City was as good as none, Fan Tong wanted to help with introductions. Before he decided how to introduce, he stopped his mouth.

Good thing he hadn't started or the curse would force him to finish the entire sentence. What resulted would have definitely been a catastrophe.

For example, if he was to say "Luo Shi is one of the Five Attendants in the Eastern City, the Queen's son," it might as well turn into "Luo Shi is one of the Five Attendants in the Eastern City, the Queen's old man," "Luo Shi is one of the Five Attendants of Eastern City, and the son of the Western City's Emperor," or some other rude slander. Despite knowing of Fan Tong's problem, Luo Shi probably wouldn't forgive him. This chip on the shoulder could last a lifetime...

"I know. He's Luo Shi.

Yue Tui smiled.

"The Eastern City's Queen's son."

Although he didn't add any honorifics, Luo Shi didn't mind. It was probably because he said it with a warm smile, or because he naturally held no ill intention, or because his face looked six-sevenths parts like Hui Shi.

Hui Shi was like an older brother to him.

Hui Shi wouldn't call him Lord Luo Shi.

"Why don't you know about him..."

*Could it be that you looked up on the bishounen?*

Fan Tong felt his thoughts were a bit terrible.

*In a minute now, we'd need to go to class.*

"Luo Shi, our class in Shufa Xuan is starting soon. Do you mind taking us there? We can't understand this place..."

"It's Fuzhou Xuan."

Yue Tui corrected.

"You two got lost and came all the way here? Ah, whatever, I'll take you there. Fan Tong, someone like you can't be understood using common sense."

Luo Shi put on a whole given-up attitude towards Fan Tong before pulling out a piece of white paper. Using his fingers, he deftly wrote out 'the common' on the Fuzhou. Where his fingers glided, marks of light lingered. When the charm was completed, he threw it upwards.

"Quan Song Zhou!"

The lights atop the charm burst out in front of him. In the blink of an eye, the nearby surroundings shifted to those of another location. The wonder of Fuzhoushu completely astonished Fan Tong. Speaking of which, Luo Shi used Fuzhou to battle when they first met. It seems Fuzhou was his strong point.

"You leave school after this class, right? Usually, there're no more classes afterwards."

"No, school ends after this class."

"Yes."

It was so easy to tell which response belonged to Fan Tong.

"Let's eat dinner together? Wait for me at the campus doors after class."

"Okay!"

No matter how strong the curse, Fan Tong successfully yelled out that okay with iron-willed determination in the end.

*Ahhhhhh, we don't need to eat the public rations for dinner tonight? Thank you for your grace and virtue, Lord Luo Shi—*

Although Fan Tong suspected that seventy percent of Luo Shi's motive for inviting them was due to Yue Tui, he didn't care. What was not to like about getting a free ride?

"Your classroom is that one over on the left. See you later."

Because he could shed the public rations nightmare tonight, Fan Tong temporarily forgot about his heartache from Shufa Xuan and went to class.

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As Fan Tong and Yue Tui stepped into their classroom, the students already inside all stared at them strangely. Fan Tong, by now, could understand the general meaning behind those stares. Everyone's ogling at Yue Tui wasn't only because he looked pretty, but also because of a larger reason: he looked very similar to the missing Hui Shi.

But, there was another meaning behind the stares right now.

"Lord Luo Shi accompanied them to the classroom..."

"Aren't they just white tassels?"

"Who is that? Lord Hui Shi's relative?"

"But he's a Westerner! One of those evil Westerners!"

It wasn't that Fan Tong wanted to mention it, but these students' conversations amongst themselves were simply too loud. When even a commoner like him could hear each word clearly, it would not be wrong to say that their volume was definitely too high. Or should he say, they didn't even bother trying to cover up? Or in all probability, they said it on purpose for them to hear?

"Fan Tong, the students don't look very friendly."

Yue Tui turned around and said to him.

*...Yue Tui. That sentence of yours, if counted as a private conversation, was said too loudly. You were too loud as well. You were too loud, I say! Are you purposely saying that to them? Or are you doing this unknowingly? Don't you see them glaring at us!*

*Maintaining a friendly bond and keeping connections with everyone is the key! Not making enemies! Though there isn't much hope left with those guys in Wushu Xuan...*

"You can't really say if they're unfriendly or not..."

Fan Tong had developed a keen sense for others' emotions through his job as a fortune teller for many years, so how could he not notice the less than friendly vibes?

"You were just complimented with a few words by the Shufa teacher. Do you think you're all that now?"

Someone exploded.

Speaking of which, in the classes Fan Tong took for these three subjects, repeating students weren't a common occurrence. But at the same time, it also meant there were still some repeats.

From what Fan Tong could see, someone who'd say something like that was probably near the "go home" level in "See one line, you are in. See two lines, you are win. See three lines, you're a genius. See no lines, go home now!" Not as if the guy could see all the way to the fourth line, but rather, he probably couldn't even see the first...

So was that a fellow companion he couldn't meet? Fan Tong grieved vaguely within his heart.

Towards that student who voiced his thoughts, Yue Tui only glanced once over in his direction to express his knowing and turned back without giving a reply. This attitude of ignoring others naturally enraged the other person further.

The student stomped over in big steps and slammed his palm on Yue Tui's desk, glaring furiously at him. Out of the blue, Fan Tong suddenly wanted to ask if he was a good student of that Tractor Teachers'. He seemed quite competent in performing violent actions.

Yue Tui adjusted the angle of his head, lifting it to see him. As their eyes met, his pair of sky blue eyes appeared entirely calm.

"Move your hands away. Go back to your seat. It's time for our lesson, classmate."

His imperative sentences flowed out incredibly smoothly, and upon hearing Yue Tui's words whilst being stared at by him, that student actually listened. He returned to his seat, his steps a little wispy. From that surrounding area came a chain of remarks, including "What are you doing?" "Why'd you listen to him?" "You're not really scared of him because he looks a bit like Lord Hui Shi, are you?" and the like. Fan Tong also found this development fairing in quite a fascinating direction.

As the one Yue Tui stared at wasn't him and the one he talked to wasn't him either, Fan Tong couldn't replicate the person's feelings in this situation.

"Yue Tui, you..."

Right when Fan Tong wanted to say something to Yue Tui, Yue Tui looked at him nervously.

"Did I deal with it well? I've never received education in dealing with this sort of situation, so I could only improvise and make it up on the spot. What do you think?"

*...With you saying that, I really don't know what to say any more. Also, the volume you are speaking at now matches the requirements of private conversation, so that means you can speak in a low voice. Then that earlier really was on purpose, wasn't it? Wasn't it?*

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The teacher had arrived now, so of course, they couldn't chitchat any longer. Fan Tong obediently straightened his back and waited for the Fuzhou teacher to determine his fate.

Except, the Fuzhou teacher didn't seem to make a hobby out of determining someone's talent at first glance, which also meant Fan Tong wouldn't know his fate right in the moment he stepped into class. He'd have to start learning to know.

After the teacher passed out the necessities to each student, he properly began to introduce the class. The study of Fu Zhou mainly focused on training two aspects: the ability to use charms and the ability to draw charms.

To become a successful Fuzhoushi, a person obviously needs to be equipped with both skills. If he's only able to do one or the other, he'd be called a Fushi or a Huafushi. Fushi must rely on charms others have written to battle, while Huafushi can only provide or sell charms for others to use. Neither of these were ideal situations.

If one didn't have enough ability when using a Fuzhou, the spell in high-class charms wouldn't activate and the effect of spells from low-class charms wouldn't serve its full potential.

And if his ability when drawing charms was insufficient, in the worst case scenario, the person wouldn't be able to draw even one working charm. In a better case, the charm may have warped functions or the spell may initiate too slowly or the like.

Seeing how Luo Shi can directly draw and use his charms, he should possess capability in both aspects.

This teacher taught very methodically and didn't have any special characteristics, so Fan Tong decided to call him the Normal Teacher.

Nothing complex would be taught in the first lesson. In general, it included the method to use the charm papers and some beginners' techniques to drawing charms. In order to draw a functioning charm, all charms one draws on the paper must be correctly linked to one another. This point wasn't far from Fan Tong's expectations. As expected, his skills in calligraphy could be put to use. After writing out his first effective Fuzhou after only a few tries, Fan Tong contentedly beamed a smile.

Looking at Yue Tui's side, it seemed he had encountered some trouble.

"Yue Tui, can you do it?"

"Ngh..."

Yue Tui looked at him with both a headache and heartache. It looked like he'd finally decided to ask for help.

"Fan Tong, how do you write with this flimsy soft pen?"

Fan Tong felt a bit weak.

He had already forgotten: Westerners had never seen calligraphy brushes before... but in this sort of place, there were no feather pens or fountain pens. Moreover, was it even allowed to write the charm without using a calligraphy brush?

Luo Shi used his fingers to write one earlier, so there were probably other ways, right? But for this matter, he would have to ask the teacher. How would he know about things like this?

"You need to learn calligraphy. It can't be hurried. I won't teach you when we go back."

This sort of speech pattern sounded very gauche. Yue Tui must mistake him for a very anxious person by now...

Before class ended, Normal Teacher had everyone pass up their practice papers for checking. When he saw Fan Tong's Fuzhou, Normal Teacher nodded his head in approval.

"Not bad. This charm's completion level is very high. Although it's the simplest Fuzhou, you were able to have such result from the first lesson. We can have good expectations for your ability in Huaifu in the future."

Fan Tong felt a sense of fulfillment from his Fuzhou class. People really needed to be praised. What a fine thing it was to be praised!

"Teacher, what type of charm is this?"

Because the charm was directly drawn according to a sample the teacher provided, Fan Tong still hadn't made clear the functions of this charm. In memory of his first functioning Fuzhou, he did want to know its name.

"This is a fire-based beginner's attack spell – Driven Fire."

"..."

The first spell he drew was the same one from that first time he died.

It truly held plenty of memorial value...

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After they left the class for Fuzhou Xuan, Fan Tong and Yue Tui waited for Luo Shi at their meeting spot in front of the campus gates. Soon afterwards, Luo Shi's somewhat petite body appeared. When they greeted each other, they naturally became a center of attention again.

It was expected that meeting at a place with such heavy crowding easily attracted attention, but with Luo Shi's background, he shouldn't mind such things. As one of the Five Attendants in the Eastern City, he'd be watched by many people in the first place.

"Fan Tong, how was Fuzhou class?"

"Tragic."

Sigh. Couldn't it allow him to express the joy within his heart just a little? This blasted curse.

"Fan Tong is so humble, when he actually did so well."

Yue Tui said with a smile. In the end, he was complimented for this misunderstanding. It was almost the same as when his business became busier after he was cursed. This really made his feelings quite complicated as to what to say.

"I thought you'd be skilled at drawing charms when I first saw the words you wrote. How about Yue Tui? Were you successful?"

It seemed Luo Shi still wasn't very used to speaking with Yue Tui. When he turned to ask him, he looked a bit discomfited.

As Luo Shi could speak with him so easily, Fan Tong didn't understand.

Could it be because he was the type that's easy to talk to? Or was it because he didn't have the aura that called for others' respect...

"I'm not very good."

Yue Tui gave a pained smile. He had to wipe ink off of his face today, and had to wash up before coming out.

If he hadn't learned the word form of the Eastern City yet, he could still trace the teacher's sample, but if he didn't know how to use a calligraphy brush, then there was really no helping it. Towards his shortcoming, Fan Tong didn't feel he needed any sympathy.

He was a prodigy only seen once in a hundred years in Shufa, and he looked pretty strong in Wushu, then there was no problem in having a weakness in Fuzhou, right? He already possessed an assurance for his future from those other skills. Besides, people were cuter when they had some flaws. For example, not knowing how to wear clothes worked as one. If the person was as perfect as a saint, then he'd seem aloof and distant.

"Is that so..."

Luo Shi looked a bit strange, and turned to Fan Tong once again.

"Fan Tong, does he know about your speech disorder?"

"He can understand the Western City's language..."

Luo Shi caught the gist of this sentence's original meaning: He couldn't understand the Eastern City's language.

Which also meant he couldn't explain it to him.

"Then how do you two communicate..."

Luo Shi looked at the two of them, feeling a fascination for the world's wonders.

"Is there something with Fan Tong's speech?"

Yue Tui didn't really understand what topic they were talking about and so he inquired.

"Do you honestly think his speech is normal?"

If that was true, the one that was abnormal would be Yue Tui.

"It's not that normal... I thought that he gets nervous and says things wrong easily, is that not it?"

Seeing Yue Tui's clear eyes, Luo Shi couldn't open his mouth to correct him.

"...If that's what you believe, that it's fine."

Fan Tong widened his eyes.

Luo Shi! Explain for me! You can speak normally, can't you?

"Fan Tong, why don't you consider this as a temporary training? If not, teach him to understand the Eastern City's words faster."

"Don't help me..."

"Why do I have to help you? You still haven't returned the five strings of qian to me. Looking at you know, it seems waiting for you to return it would take forever."

Yeah. Even if he wanted to return it, he couldn't. All of his salary and income from public service directly gets transmitted to suppress his debt, unless he works privately to make money.

"Alright, let's go. I'll take you guy somewhere good to eat."

Luo Shi beamed at them while saying this. Nhn, it appeared the amount of gazes shooting at them have increased again...

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"You two couldn't find the classroom but could walk to the campus gates from it?"

"Following the other students will eventually lead us out here."

They'd just have to follow the students when they were about to leave. The power of grouping was very strong. And that was how they followed the mob and came to the school doors. But in reality, they didn't remember the paths they walked to get out here.

The next time they wanted to attend class, finding the classroom would remain a difficulty.

"At first glimpse, the classrooms in Fuzhou Xuan appear very jumbled and disorderly, but there is still a certain order to it. After you learn about more spells, you'll pass those roads and spaces effortlessly."

While Luo Shi said that, he handed them a map of Fuzhou Xuan. With this map, at least they can determine how far they'd gotten lost.

"You're welcome. Then the maps for Shufa Xuan and Wushu Xuan, would you incidentally..."

"If you need a map for even Shufa Xuan and Wushu Xuan, you might as well have another round in reincarnation."

*You don't have to be that cruel, do you?*

At this time, the restaurant service worker had brought them some steaming hot tea and placed an intricately made menu on the tables. Yue Tui couldn't even read the characters on the menu, so naturally he wouldn't be able to place an order himself. Even if he could, he'd probably have no idea what the dish names meant. On the other hand, Fan Tong could understand the dish names, but he could also understand the prices behind them. Although it appeared that Luo Shi was treating them and he wouldn't have to worry about the cost, he still felt guilty about making someone else pay. Hence, the two of them looked towards Luo Shi.

"Just pick whatever you want."

Luo Shi looked at them oddly.

This restaurant differed from the place Fan Tong borrowed five strings to eat at last time. Even the appetizers started at ten strings. Plus, to prevent disruption from other guests, they were seated in a reserved room. If this wasn't the usual treatment the restaurant gave Luo Shi, then it probably cost extra money... This was probably Luo Shi's usual standard of living, huh? In the

end, he was still a prince. His capacity to consume couldn't be counted in the same way as a regular red tassel's.

"I can't understand the menu. Could you decide for me?"

Yue Tui gave up on inspecting the words he couldn't comprehend at all. With his voicing, Fan Tong also hurried to verbalize.

"I've never been here before. Could you recommend us something disgusting to eat?"

He wanted to ask for a recommendation for something good to eat... Luo Shi would understand him, he believed.

"If that's how it is, I'll decide then."

As a result, Luo Shi ordered the same thing for the three of them.

The time before the food appears was obviously the time to chat. Chatting promoted empathy between one another, so finding a topic to talk about was essential.

"Is Luo Shi a teacher in Fuzhou Xuan?"

Until now, three out of four teachers he saw were red tassels. Then Luo Shi, who also bore a bright red tassel, should have the qualifications to be a teacher. Only that Luo Shi was a Natural Resident, so logically, even if he were a teacher, he'd teach the Natural Residents.

"No, I'm... still learning."

When Luo Shi answered, a shadow seemed to have shaded over his face. Fan Tong couldn't identify with his anguish and continued to ask.

"Wha, aren't red tassels really weak already? Then who's your teacher?"

Although he understood the sentence came out this way due to the curse, Luo Shi still felt stabbed by those words, and thus grew a bit unhappy.

"Yin Shi and Ling Shi can be counted as my teachers, although the time they instruct me isn't very much."

He was actually being taught by the two rectors... truly a treatment only a prince could enjoy. Logically, rectors were held responsible as supervisors and wouldn't teach classes. If he was taught by them, the lessons were probably very enlightening.

Then what about Wei Shi? He was the temporary rector of Wushu Xuan—he wasn't teaching?

"You want to ask about Wei Shi and Hui Shi?"

Luo Shi grunted and looked displeased, but he didn't reject talking about them.

Fan Tong didn't know his expressions were so easy to understand.

"Among the Five Attendants, Wei Shi's actions are quite prejudiced. No one really likes him and aren't very close to him. As for Hui Shi..."

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When he reached Hui Shi, Luo Shi paused for a moment, as though he didn't know what words and what attitude he should have when speaking about him.

"I didn't hear that Hui Shi was missing for two years."

When "heard" changed to "didn't hear," it felt like he was trying to hide something but ended up revealing himself.

"Yeah."

Luo Shi looked away, towards a corner of the room as if his heart wasn't there.

"On a certain day two years ago, he suddenly disappeared. He never came back afterwards."



He stopped there and didn't continue. The sadness that resonated from him suddenly created a silence between the three of them.

Ultimately, he practically said nothing about Hui Shi. Fan Tong already knew about his disappearance two years ago. Luo Shi merely repeated what he already knew...

"Why don't you say a bit more."

Sitting on the side, Yue Tui suddenly voiced his words.

"When New Residents come to Huan Shi, it means they are completely cut from their past friends and family. If your heart accepts it, then you'll feel better."

Fan Tong felt alright really. In the first place, his parents died long ago, so the only connection he'd be cut from was probably that fortune-telling business of his. Even then, he didn't hold much affection towards that store.

"Hui Shi might not have died!"

Luo Shi was very sensitive to this sort of topic and instantly refuted.

"He just hasn't come back yet, he just..."

At this, Luo Shi became quiet again. All those words sounded like excuses, excuses to explain Hui Shi's disappearance, or actually, excuses to convince himself?

He was always waiting for Hui Shi to come back. He couldn't bring himself to tell this to anyone.

He would be ridiculed if he said it. Then he'd also succumb to the influence and think Hui Shi really wouldn't come back.

Every day, every single day, he'd look far out beyond the city gates at night. Then he'd add a new stroke to the notebook he had.

Anyone who knew this would find him foolish.

"..."

Seeing his expression, Yue Tui said no further and quietly sipped his tea.

"Ugh..."

They really shouldn't have talked about Hui Shi, Fan Tong felt.

Speaking of Hui Shi only made the atmosphere even stiffer...

Their food came now, timed perfectly to shift their attention. But with this atmosphere, any good food tasted rather bland. What a waste.

"The Eastern City's Five Attendants, are you all really free usually?"

Switching the topic was vital. Fan Tong had only heard there were Five Attendants under the Queen with high social status, but as for what exactly they did and what duties they performed regularly, he was unclear.

As for 'busy' being changed to 'free', he minded it no longer. He was already thanking the heavens for not changing the Eastern City to the Western City or Luo Yue.

"I'm not telling you."

Luo Shi rebelliously replied, perhaps influenced by the earlier conversation. Though it was a slightly immature remark, why did it sound rather cute... It must be because the one saying it was a bishounen. If Mi Chong said the same words, Fan Tong probably wouldn't be able to resist from punching him.

"Oh... okay."

"What? You were just rejected once. You're not going to ask again?"

Luo Shi was displeased again.

"If you ask a few more times, I might tell you, you know."

*...What is this now? Ask a few more times? That's no problem, but the next time I ask, what happens if the Eastern City becomes the Western City?*

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"Could you tell us about the Five Attendants' jobs?"

Yue Tui asked for him. What a nice person.

"Hm... The most common job right now is taking turns to snatch people from the Chen Yue pathway. Individually, Yin Shi, Ling Shi and Wei Shi, for example, are accountable for directing the campus. Ling Shi also takes care of sealing the New Residents' memory. Things like this."

From Luo Shi's composed tone, for some reason he didn't know, Fan Tong almost heard a sense of self-pity.

Ngh, was it because he didn't have a specific job? But a red tassel couldn't really be a rector...

"My ability only brings me to a bright red tassel. Natural Residents won't be reborn after they die, so I can't participate in anything important or dangerous."

Alright, Fan Tong could understand where his sense of self-pity came from now. But must he push himself so hard? If it was up to Fan Tong, he'd be more than happy to stay away from anything dangerous.

"You're only fourteen years old. Having a red tassel is already very amazing."

His words of encouragement came out properly, which was wonderful. While Fan Tong rejoiced, Luo Shi's eyes suddenly turned dangerous.

"You said amazing... that means you wanted to say horrible, is it?"

How awful. He still heard the opposite meaning.

"The ten percent... you remember the ten percent chance, right?"

If this misunderstanding persisted, he'd fail to explain even if he had a hundred mouths and would most likely end up with much more than he can chew. Fan Tong terribly wanted to justify himself, but Yue Tui continued to look at them with a confused expression.

"Whatever. He was young too. Hui Shi was already a pale black tassel at seventeen."

With the effort he put in, how did the topic still revolved back to Hui Shi? *Is this what is known as big brother's shadow? Also, comparing yourself to people above you is very hard. Why don't you consider all those who aren't as good as you?*

"You're not seventeen yet, though."

Yue Tui added in, again. It sounded logical enough. Hm, no, the reasoning was rather peculiar.

"Hui Shi was already a purple tassel when he was fourteen."

Luo Shi puckered his brow in refute.

"But Hui Shi is Hui Shi, and you are you. Why do you have to be the same as Hui Shi?"

"Because I am the Queen's son!"

*Hahhh, why don't you listen to Yue Tui's words? I think they deserve some space for consideration...*

"The Queen's son, so you have to live up to everyone's expectations and be stronger than everyone else?"

Yue Tui contested in a light tone and also answered his own question.

"I think... no matter if it's in the Eastern City or the Western City, no matter if it's New Residents or Natural Residents, the important thing is to remember how to 'smile,' and how to stop oneself from being engulfed by negative emotions..."

Luo Shi stiffened for a moment and didn't say anything more. Fan Tong felt quite troubled.

*Ahhhh! What atmosphere is this! Can we not remain in this gloomy mood! I don't like it like this!*

"...This is the money for the meal."

Luo Shi tossed the money on the table and stood up.

"I'm leaving first. You two can sit longer."

*Is this the legendary situation of parting on bad terms—*

"Thank you for treating us."

Yue Tui politely expressed his gratitude. Fan Tong could only follow it with the usual adieu.

"You're welcome. Leave already."

"...Fan Tong, that speech problem of yours is terrible."

Luo Shi left them this sentence and walked down the stairs.

*It's not like I want to—!*

### © Fan Tong's Afterword

The more people I come to meet, the more normal I feel I am. There's nothing bad about being a normal person. It's acceptable as long as I can make friends who aren't.

You say I've said I'm a blessed genius, and more than once? That's in regards to fortune-telling, you know. If you tell me to compete in fortune-telling with Yue Tui, I'd definitely win. How would we compete? Of course, we'll grab a random person off the street and look at his palms or something. Not to mention, Yue Tui still doesn't know calligraphy yet, so it's certain that I'd win. Yeah, you have a problem with that? Is having confidence a bad thing? Stop trying to upset me by saying how the curse made my business better! I'm immune to it already! Immune! Do you hear me!

I've attended a class from each of the three main schools in the Eastern City and have found my new talent now. Wushu Xuan, it doesn't matter even if I don't go to class. Shufa Xuan, tch, so what if I have no talent, who wants it? As long as I do well in Fuzhou!

But they haven't started teaching us the ability to use spells. What'd happen if I can only draw charms... What'd you say? I can just draw charms for Yue Tui to use? I don't want such a tragic ending! Why must I be a nameless servant working in the background, and all the recognition and reputation be given to other people! I want to face enemies head on as well, you know! But of course, it's better to leave it to others if it gets too dangerous...

I seriously think people who keep their thoughts inside without saying them will eventually become ill. But with my vernacular talent, counseling Luo Shi seems a bit difficult. Although I know I'd find the guy if I go to the city gates in the middle of the night, if I don't have a speech prepared, there's no use even if I see him.

Speaking of which, I still haven't asked how Yue Tui died. Nor have I asked about his background. Is he really as I thought, a rich young master?

Digging into someone else's privacy on the first day is not very appealing. I guess I'll wait until our relationship's a bit sturdier before I ask. Our bond can begin with us going to

school together and lugging each other's bodies out together. I believe we'd be inseparable buddies after we salvage one another a few times. Sigh, right, I can also teach him calligraphy.

I wonder if I can ask him to challenge Mi Chong for me?...

But that's all talk. As a man, I'd have to do it myself when exacting revenge, you know! Ahahahahah!

# Chapter 4

## Settling In

*“It’s just that our beds have been assigned. Is there a need to make it sound like we’re some newly married couple buying a house?” – Fan Tong*

“Fan Tong, Fan Tong!”

After skipping school for three days, Fan Tong was visited once more by Mi Zhong this morning.

As for why he skipped for three days, it was because “Chen Yue Jie” was soon approaching. In order to prepare for the related events, and to allow for everyone to fully welcome this important holiday, the entire Eastern City had gone on holiday status twelve days prior. Until the day of the holiday, since it included the whole city, the school would naturally be closed as well. Even if the students wanted to attend, there’d be no school for them to go to.

During this period, Yue Tui endeavored in studying the city’s language textbooks. Fan Tong very kindly helped him and, at the same time, taught him the correct way to hold a brush and the techniques to writing calligraphy.

Yue Tui was a very smart person, and smart people usually possessed a sort of innate knack for learning new skills. Even if they didn’t master the subject completely, they still grasped ideas and contents at fast pace. However, the speed at which Yue Tui was learning calligraphy was so horrible Fan Tong couldn’t bear to watch. In comparison, Yue Tui’s language comprehension improved rather quickly. At present, he could already read two out of every five words on the street signs, though this level of understanding wouldn’t be of much assistance yet.

Fan Tong thought people who excelled in martial arts should be fairly adept at managing the use of weight and pressure. That was why he found Yue Tui’s inability to handle a calligraphy brush quite bizarre. Was it because an emotional barrier rejected the idea, and thus prevented him from doing well?

When he asked Yue Tui whether he should give up, Yue Tui responded sincerely, “Since I’ll be living in the Eastern City from now on, it’s my duty to assimilate into this city’s culture and live in the same way the residents do. As the Eastern City’s people use calligraphy brushes, it’s only right for me to use a brush as well”... This sort of determination beyond doubt calls for respect, but if he had this mindset, why couldn’t he learn well...

At any rate, they had already been practicing calligraphy for three days at home, and had also eaten the public rations for three days. Public rations was something that as one consumed more of it, it’d make one want to level up, earn a salary, and eat normal food. Even Yue Tui,

who didn't care much about being a white tassel, began to consider battling a green tassel and bilking out some salary.

Regrettably, first ignoring the fact that they hadn't researched who to find for testing yet, this issue would be out of the question with everyone gone on vacation until Chen Yue Jie.

Unless they leveled up by fighting with someone... But Yue Tui said he wasn't going to consider this, since he didn't like this kind of method that required stepping over another person's effort. Fan Tong could only say, Yue Tui was truly a good person.

*You don't have to kill the person when fighting with him. Although winning would cause the guy to drop a rank, making it sort of a parasitic relationship, but isn't this just part of society's laws to survival? What's so bad about it?*

"Fan Tong, your bed location has been assigned! You can finally move into your official residence!"

The main reason Mi Zhong came today was to convey this message.

Why does he feel like this wasn't worth celebrating at all?

They were doing no more than moving to an even smaller space. Albeit they added the word official in front, that still didn't please anyone by the tiniest bit.

"You say my bed's been confirmed. Then what about my neighbor?"

Fan Tong pointed to Yue Tui, who was practicing calligraphy nearby. Yue Tui also looked towards Mi Zhong.

If he could live with Yue Tui and act together for things, there'd at least be one reason worth getting happy over.

"Oh, your neighbor's been assigned as well. He's sleeping with you."

Mi Zhong checked the documents on him and reported. He then noticed Yue Tui's existence, and clicked his tongue after looking at Yue Tui.

"Tch, Fan Tong is so lucky, to be able to live with such a beautiful person. He really does look a bit like Lord Hui Shi. You've won big."

*...He's not a beautiful female or anything, so what exactly are you envying about? Are the people living with you some ogre or demon? Why does he looking like Lord Hui Shi have anything to do with me winning big? Won't you give me at least some proper logic to this?*

"Mi Zhong."

"Hm?"

"You don't like guys, do you?"

When asking this discourteous question, the curse didn't disrupt him. Good job.

"This... When you ask me this way, it's really hard for me to answer you. Generally, I like females, you know! But Lord Ling Shi..."

Mi Zhong revealed an incredibly complex and troubled expression, but what did that have to do with Lord Ling Shi? Wasn't Lord Ling Shi female?

"Fan Tong, don't worry. Although my sexuality is unconfirmed as of now, or even if I'm confirmed to like men in the future, I won't like you. You don't have to be worried at—all—"

Great to know he wouldn't need to worry, but why did that sound slightly offensive?

"Then should I be worried?"

Yue Tui looked a bit worried.

"Don't look at me like I'm some suspicious bacteria all of sudden, won't you? Stop teasing me already."

Mi Zhong waved his hand and brought them back to the main topic.

“Anyways, let’s move. If your neighbor wants to move now too, he can. Gather your things a bit and I’ll lead you there. You two are assigned to a three-person room, so there’s going to be another roommate... Oh right, are you really close with Lord Luo Shi? I’ve been hearing a good plenty of rumors.”

And before he finished a few sentences, he strayed from the topic again.

“If you say close, we’re not that close...”

“Really? But I heard he intimately ate a late night snack with you and caringly led you to class, and you two even dated in public in front of the campus doors, and that Lord Luo Shi becomes happy whenever he sees you, when he’s typically such an aloof person.”

“When did that hap— Cough! Cough Cough!”

Fan Tong choked on his own saliva.

*When did that happen—! Wait, now that I think of it, we did seem to do something like that. But why does it sound so weird when you hear it! Are the things we did really that weird, or no, looks like rumors really are a frightening thing—!*

“Other than the late night snack, I participated in all the other events...”

Yue Tui felt he was being obscured by the rumors.

“Oh? Is that so? Then what really happened?”

*Are you here to dig for gossip? And with a face full of anticipation?*

Fan Tong eyed Yue Tui telling him that he needed help. Yue Tui understood and spoke for him.

“I think... Luo Shi is just a normal friend.”

“Oh hey— So you don’t call him Lord Luo Shi but rather directly by Luo Shi, hm?”

Explanation failed. It seemed they’d only dig their grave further the more they spoke.

“...Spreading these rumors, aren’t you afraid of Luo Shi finding out?”

Yue Tui appeared too lazy to explain more, but he was starting to feel annoyed by this situation.

“Of course we’re scared, but who would tell this to his face?”

That was true. Luo Shi was so easy to recognize.

“There’re no other news? Do you really have nothing else to tell me?”

“We had something to tell you in the first place...”

“Just tell me if there is anything, won’t you? Let me earn a few pennies. Although Lord Luo Shi feels quite distant, he still has some fans...”

*I wanted to say we had nothing to tell you, and who would want you to earn money? You wouldn’t split with me. No, this isn’t the first problem to contemplate about. I shouldn’t tell you this and that even if you would split with me...*

“Hahh. Whatever if you have nothing. Hurry and pack your stuff. I’ll lead you to your new home.”

Mi Zhong gestured his hand, disclosing his immense disappointment. His objective here should’ve been to help them out with the move in the first place. Why did he forget about the most important thing?

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As for their luggage, it was no more than a few pieces of clothing plus a couple textbooks. It was very convenient. They followed Mi Zhong to a region near the campus. Based on the mass of orderly lodgings here, this should be the New Resident’s dormitory area.

They were living in a three-person room right now, but “there was a chance” they can move to a two-person room after rising to a blue tassel rank. Why only a “chance”? Of course that was because they’d need someone to move out in order to have space for them to move in. So they couldn’t be too hopeful.

Three out of every ten New Residents could become blue tassels. As for the other seven, they were fated to be greens and whites their entire lives. That also meant most people lived in three-person rooms, so there was no need to despair simply because they were in a cramped space, because it was the same for everybody.

If you could become a red tassel, then the city would naturally consider you important property, and you’d be automatically transferred to a single room. But for something as distant as a red tassel, Fan Tong didn’t have the nerve to think about it yet.

“No one is living in the temporary housing right now, right? Then why do we need to move?”

Perplexed, Yue Tui inquired. They were living just fine where they were originally.

“Everyone’s in a three-person room. Do you think you can be special?”

Mi Zhong shrugged his shoulders, answering Yue Tui’s question.

“With the temporary location emptied, we can take in another New Resident who hasn’t been assigned a bed location yet. Even if there are extra houses, they’re reserved for Natural Residents. There’s no chance for New Residents, you know.”

There really was discrimination. Sigh, becoming a red tassel looks more probable in comparison. Since no matter what they did, they wouldn’t become Natural Residents.

The dorms’ outer walls were painted white. Some people wrote and drew graffiti on certain spots, slightly upsetting the aesthetics. Especially because most of these crazed outbursts started with “Lord Ling Shi”, it was certainly terrible. In this rare occasion, it was a good thing Yue Tui didn’t understand the language here, Fan Tong felt.

“You’re assigned room forty-four of the top floor. Don’t panic because I said the top floor, since there are only four levels in this building.”

Four four four<sup>17</sup>?

*Can we switch rooms? We’ve already died and we’d still have to live in this sort of place. What change of luck is this? Plus, isn’t this the Eastern City? Rationally speaking, shouldn’t they avoid something as odious as a fourth floor! How unprofessional!*

“The previous dwellers of this room, I think eight out of ten died from having their souls destroyed by the soul purging weapons. The last two were these poor lads who owed more than a thousand strings. The pain from a debt that big hurts more than a woman giving birth, you know. I’m not a woman and haven’t given birth before, but that’s what everyone says. Don’t you find it amusing? Hahaha.”

*Your mother is amusing.*

Fan Tong had a sudden urge to salute Mi Zhong’s mom.

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“I’ll only lead you to here, so go up by yourselves, alright? Get along with your roommate and classmates, okay?”

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<sup>17</sup> The character for “four” in Chinese is a homonym for the character for “to die”, so having 444 as a room number is considered very unlucky.



The third roommate was still unidentified as of yet. As for getting along with the other students... up until this moment, the two of them have failed quite badly.

Of course, Fan Tong wouldn't expect an elevator system or the like. They could only use the primeval method to reach the fourth floor—walking up the stairs. To be honest, this was already pretty good. If the dorms were designed in the same fashion as Fuzhou Xuan, Fan Tong felt he'd rather feed on the rain and sleep in the dew, upon imagining all the struggles he must go through to climb a flight of stairs.

"Fan Tong..."

The one who pushed open the door to room forty-four was Yue Tui. Glancing inside, he expressed his thoughts in an odd tone.

"The room... is quite small, isn't it."

Fan Tong leaned in to look, and when he did, he felt the stinginess of the Eastern City once again.

There weren't even three beds. There was only one triple bunk bed.

A picture was worth a thousand words. Stacked together, the top, middle, and bottom bunks fully displayed its space-saving capability...

Would they have to roshambo to decide who gets which bunk now?

Other than the tear-inducing triple bunk bed, there was also a desk. Yes, there are three people, but only one desk. There was also a shelf separated into three sections, clearly suggesting each space per person. Did the Eastern City believe everyone's belongings wouldn't exceed this allotted space? What happens if they exceeded?

The suspicious thing was, they included a bathroom in this highly economical design. Alright, it was a shower room at best and can be used for washing up, but how was this possible? Logically speaking, shouldn't they make everyone use a public bath or something?

Fan Tong held full skepticism against this shower room. If he wanted hot water, they'd probably give him cold; maybe weird things will pop out from the pipes, or something.

But, where was the other roommate? Not here yet?

It was understandable if the person didn't want to live here, being assigned to a room numbered four-four-four and all. If he really didn't plan on coming, then a room with two people would actually be more spacious...

Seized by a whim at the moment, Yue Tui opened the shower room door. He suddenly screamed after a look inside, slammed shut the door, and backed away a few steps at the same time. Shocked by Yue Tui's abnormal behavior, Fan Tong hurriedly asked.

"Yue Tui, what is it?"

"Inside, there's a gi, gi, gi..."

It appeared Yue Tui was so shocked he couldn't stutter out a proper word. Now with his curiosity perked, Fan Tong also wanted to open the door, but Yue Tui slapped his hand away.

"I already said there's a girl showering inside. Why are you still opening the door?!"

*Unfair! You didn't say that. Though even if you said it, I'd still want to open the door and further understand the situation. Why are you such a gentleman?...*

As time passed during their few sentences worth of conversation, the door was opened from the inside. Except, the person who walked out wearing no top and only a towel around the waist, was a boy no matter how you looked at him.

*He's clearly a guy. Flat as a board, that's a chest no matter how I see it. Yue Tui, have you become blind? You made me all happy for nothing.*

Though with someone coming out from the shower, at least now he knew the shower room was functional.

“Huh?”

Yue Tui was very surprised upon seeing the youth. It almost seemed like he wanted to go inside to check if there was another person.

“...”

The youth’s appearance could be counted as fair and cute. He shouldn’t be older than fourteen or fifteen. At the moment, he was staring at them weirdly, as though they were acting very strangely.

“Hi, we’re your roommates. I’m Yue Tui.”

Yue Tui finally recovered from the shock and politely greeted him.

“I’m not Fan Tong.”

Until when did this curse plan to play with him!

“I’m Zhu Sha.”

The boy reported his name, watching Fan Tong like he was some mutant. He didn’t seem to have an interest in finding out what to call him if he wasn’t Fan Tong though. His attention paused on Yue Tui for a fairly long time, apparently ignoring Fan Tong completely.

“The tour guide said we’d probably live in this room for a long time, so I guess we should decide on the bed arrangements first?”

Looks like he’s a roommate they can get along with. What good luck this is, Fan Tong felt.

“I can do either...”

Yue Tui didn’t have an opinion about sleeping on the top, middle, or bottom.

“I want the top bunk.”

*Stop joking with me! I want to sleep on the bottom!*

“I’ll take the bottom bunk then.”

Zhu Sha on the bottom, Yue Tui in the middle, and Fan Tong on top. So, before Fan Tong could take back his words and correct them, the matter had already been settled.

Shouldn’t the top bunk be given to the person with an agile body? Hey, I have to climb to get up there while Yue Tui just has to jump once, you know? Maybe I could discuss this with Yue Tui some more... but it looks even more difficult to get into the middle bunk...

As for jumping to the top bunk in one leap, even if he could do it, he shouldn’t. Who would know if the city was being shoddy with their materials? What’d happen if the whole thing collapsed once he jumped on it? Could they ask the government for another one?

Finished with the bed issue, Zhu Sha then took his luggage from the corner and onto his bed, getting ready to put on his clothes. Only after he was done did Fan Tong notice that he had a pale green tassel.

To Fan Tong, a white tassel with absolutely no money, even a pale green tassel was very admirable. Yue Tui could instantly become a pale green once he finds out the how to, but Fan Tong couldn’t.

“I don’t like to be bothered when I’m sleeping, so don’t call me even if I’ll be late. Otherwise, prepare to take responsibility for it.”

*Getting up is it? Understood, understood.*

“How about you two?”

Zhu Sha widened his eyes, asking them if they had any taboos or anything to make note of when living together.



“I... think I’m good generally. I can’t think of anything right now.”

With Yue Tui’s personality, it’d be quite difficult to make him mad. As for “I don’t like to be hit,” “I don’t like to be killed,” “I don’t like to be provoked,” and other universal dislikes everyone agrees on, there’s no need to specially mention them.

“I speak normally.”

He really wasn’t trying to be weird to catch his roommate’s attention.

“So?”

Zhu Sha ultimately posed his suspicions.

“I just wanted to say, don’t mind the things I say.”

That puzzled Zhu Sha even more, slightly infuriating him.

“Why do I need to mind? Is everything you say incredibly important?”

*I’m sorry. Actually, everything I say is garbage. I apologize to the whole world.*

*Oh, right! Maybe Zhu Sha would understand how to read the Eastern City’s words! Then I can explain to him!*

Suddenly realizing this point, he took out the explanation paper from his waistband and handed it to him.

Speaking of which, he’s already written the note for so long and yet never thought of showing it to Mi Zhong... Was this some sort of subconscious filtering?

Zhu Sha looked at it and seemed to understand the words. Fan Tong felt somewhat relieved.

But this short jiffy of relief soon transformed into sadness. Zhu Sha gave the paper back to him, replying with only four words.

“I don’t believe you.”

*...We’re all going to be roommates sleeping under the same roof. Do you have to be this way? In order to get along with someone for a long period of time, one must first nurture a sense of trust in others, right?*

“Just what is written on there?”

Even now, Yue Tui couldn’t understand the words completely, so he asked again out of curiosity.

“A bunch of far-fetched occurrences that have a very low chance of actually happening.”

*Even if you don’t believe me, you could still at least clarify it for Yue Tui, couldn’t you, little boy?*

“Huh? Fan Tong, so you wanted to show me a story?”

*The direction’s completely skewed now! Do you think I’m a novelist? Why is it so hard to create empathy between humans—*

Fan Tong held his knees against the wall, fully shot down by the chain of attacks.

“Fan Tong... are you alright?”

“I’m fine.”

Even when he didn’t want to push himself and wanted to be honest, he couldn’t speak his true feelings. This curse really lived up to its name: a curse.

“We’ll be living together for a long time. You should know that too, so we should treat one another with honesty. Don’t randomly play jokes on your roommates.”

Zhu Sha crossed his arms, reprimanding him with dissatisfaction. Fan Tong has truly, become speechless.

“Fan Tong’s not doing it on purpose... I think.”

Yue Tui forced a smile to help him. Since he was planning on helping him, shouldn't he at least say it with more confidence? It didn't sound very persuasive this way.

"I want to grab lunch. Are you guys going?"

The public rations? No thanks.

"We only eat dinner..."

That's how they lived for the past few days. Their stomachs felt empty twenty-four-seven, but if they ate the public pass outs, not only would their life not be anymore fulfilled, but their minds would become more drained.

"Why are you guys so unhealthy? You should be eating three meals a day, with an extra snack on the day you have more time."

Zhu Sha expanded his eyes, as if they were freaks.

"...Excuse me for asking, but, don't you find the food gross?"

"Food is food. They all taste the same."

Hearing Zhu Sha say that, in a certain sense, Fan Tong thought he was worth commending.

"If you're picky with food, your body might become underdeveloped."

Patching those words, Zhu Sha caused Fan Tong's face to fully collapse.

*Little boy, have you forgotten that you're already dead? Do you think you're still alive and still possess a normal body? What development. You wouldn't grow anymore... right?*

"Yue Tui, New Residents should still grow right..."

*Said it wrong again. No matter. Hurry and disagree with me, Yue Tui.*

"How did you know?"

Who would've guessed that Yue Tui's reaction would completely differ from his expectations?

"If you have enough money to exchange, little kids can grow up and seniors can become younger. The Eastern City has shufa that does this. It's just really expensive."

So it was. That still had nothing to do with eating correct foods though. Also, when did Yue Tui become more knowledgeable about the city than him...?

Looking at this, had Fan Tong hit a bargain? He didn't need to become older or younger. He was at the perfect age.

"Otherwise, if an adult changes bodies too much, they have a danger of becoming old."

The words Yue Tui amended brought him from heaven to hell.

"But, that's only a probability, so you don't have to be too worried..."

*Don't you understand? That for all things unfortunate, no matter how big a difference the numerator and denominator has with one another in that probability, I would still come across it?*

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After living in the dorms for a week, Fan Tong learned more about the New Residents and gained a deeper understanding of Zhu Sha.

It seemed Western faces were really quite rare in the Eastern City. Going in and out this past week, he didn't see more than five people with gold or red colored hair. As for most of the city's residents, they held a certain disdain towards New Residents who were Westerners. They'd find them an eyesore, and harassment would more or less happen as well. Once, when

Yue Tui walked on the street, for example, some people purposely bumped into him. No matter the tassel color, each group contained an abundant amount of people with such immaturity.

Of course Yue Tui noticed these feelings of contempt from the general public as well. But this wasn't an issue that he could solve simply by dying his hair, or rather, he didn't do anything wrong, so he shouldn't have to lower himself to such methods just to gain respect. That'd only make the egocentric people feel even more pleased with themselves.

Luckily, their roommate Zhu Sha wasn't the type that thought "Since Westerners are not of my race, those with a Western face that are more talented than me should all die." He believed that since everyone was a part of the Eastern City, they should all get along. Although the highly biased groups considered anyone who familiarized themselves with Westerners as traitors, Zhu Sha didn't seem to care.

After seven days of observation, Fan Tong more or less had an impression of Zhu Sha: he had no taste buds, maintained extremely proper meal habits and manners, took showers twice a day, was serious, and was determined.

Zhu Sha appeared to be the kind of person that persisted in doing his part—even though school was closed; he still studied and did homework at home. He organized his notes and skimmed through the books in an effort to be ahead. Unless Yue Tui needed the desk to practice calligraphy, he would be there using it the whole day.

Zhu Sha came to the Eastern City before they did, so naturally, he'd have attended more classes. As for the two of them who had only attended one class, they hadn't even learned the basics. They wouldn't understand anything if they tried to look ahead in their books, and there was nothing to review. It was quite hopeless. At least Yue Tui could still practice his calligraphy and learn some written characters, but Fan Tong truly had nothing to do.

They weren't the only ones who thought about mingling and making more connections with the other students, as many others also understood the importance of networking. Some people purely loved liveliness and hated feeling alone, while a number of people didn't care about the differences between Westerners and Easterners. Just today, the classmates from room 448 and 449 kindly invited them to a chat tonight.

Yue Tui didn't mind this type of thing, and Zhu Sha thought that leaving the book to socialize was a bit valuable as well. Although Fan Tong wasn't very good at making conversation, it would be standoffish of him if he refused when the other two agreed. Hence, he joined the excitement and decided to go.

The chosen location was room 448, apparently because it was comparably larger. Upon hearing this point, Fan Tong suddenly realized they'd have to cramp nine people in this room... Was that really possible? Wouldn't it be too cramped? Didn't they think they were pushing it a little?

Not to mention, they said room 448 belonged to a few girls. Sticking three girls with six guys together, wouldn't the girls feel awkward? Were they that open? Did this count as socializing?

If they were pretty girls, that'd be really nice. But due to the curse, Fan Tong wouldn't have the opportunity to flirt with them. His fate as a single man would have to continue.

"On manners, should we prepare some presents?"

Yue Tui troubled over this question.

*You're too kind, aren't you? We're completely broke. What would you have to give to them? Do you have some sort of souvenir from your past life?*

"If I have to give presents, then I'm not going."

Zhu Sha was very practical. See that—he knows how to save and cut costs.

“But if we accepted an invitation, we should at least give them something...”

*You’re not a young master any more, you know. Please hurry and forget about the things you learned in your past life.*

“Give them what?”

*Good comeback.*

“...Forget it. Pretend this didn’t happen.”

Yue Tui finally noticed the problems with reality and finally quit. And so, that evening, the three of them punctually knocked on the door of room 448.

Cute Girl A received the door. She gave a wide smile upon seeing them. Counting the number of people inside, Fan Tong presumed that the guys from room 449 had already arrived.

Going in, they genially greeted each person. Because it was inconvenient for Fan Tong to talk, Yue Tui thoughtfully introduced him instead. He only smiled and nodded his head.

The room was fairly wide. Everyone found a place to sit, and it wasn’t even to the point where they had to sit on the middle or upper bunks. Yue Tui, who had his seat assigned to the lower bunk of the bed, felt a little embarrassed. Zhu Sha, who was assigned to the same lower bunk, openly took the seat without the discomfort of sitting on a bed where a girl slept.

It appeared their conversation could start.

But, why are there only eight people?

“Excuse us, Bi Rou went out for a moment. She’ll be back soon.”

Cute Girl B explained with a smile. The reason was quite normal. Fan Tong felt that if he was in this situation, the explanation would probably be, “Sorry, Fan Tong just died. He should be back soon from regenerating in the Pool” or something...

“Bi Rou?”

Yue Tui was dazed for a second and quietly mumbled the name under his breath. No one noticed, so no one asked him about it.

Although someone was missing, it was alright to start chatting a little. When there were many people talking at the same time, each person’s focus would naturally veer off course. In such a situation, no one really noticed whether Fan Tong talked or not. Fan Tong felt a bit relieved.

The guys from room 449 protested that Cute Girl A’s smile was much brighter when she greeted Fan Tong and his two roommates. But that was the way of the world. Compared to the plain faces of the guys from room 449, the three of them from room 444 could be considered quite handsome and outstanding. It was a woman’s right to be more excited towards good-looking men. Fan Tong admitted his appearance wasn’t half bad either. It wasn’t purely because of Yue Tui and Zhu Sha that they were so warmly welcomed.

*But this mouth. Haah. Haaaaaaaaaaaaah.*

The first topic they talked about was school life and the teachers. The two cute girls were both white tassels, while two of the guys from room 449 were whites and one was pale green. This also meant their chances of taking the same classes were very high.

“Everyone was killed by that Wushu Combat teacher, right?”

That Wushu Combat teacher made perfect complaint material.

“Yeah! The whole class ganging up on a new student—that’s too immoral!”

“Once I polish my skills, I’m going to battle him!”

Even Zhu Sha became angry. Was everyone taught by that Tractor Teacher for Wushu Combat?

Yue Tui didn't have the courage to say anything since he didn't die. After all, some things were better left unsaid, or they would only enrage the people further.

"That person is rotten! How could he have New Residents kill off fellow New Residents!"

"Yeah, yeah!"

While they talked with each other enthusiastically, Fan Tong was more interested in knowing if they participated in the kills when other new students joined the class...

"I'm back—"

At this time, the door flung open, accompanied by a sweet voice. Of course, the person was the girl called Bi Rou. Everyone looked in the door's direction.

The girl was actually a Westerner as well.

She was probably a bit older than Yue Tui. Bi Rou had a mane of luscious golden hair, fine white skin, and beautifully-defined facial features. These all emitted the characteristics of a Western person. Whether considering her face or body, they were all undoubtedly very charismatic. After coming to this world Fan Tong saw a beautiful woman up close for the first time.

Alright, the first time actually belonged to Ling Shi, but that incident was closely linked with the memories of his first death. He really didn't want to recall those memories.

"Did I come back too late? Everyone should've heard already, right? I'm Bi Rou. It's very nice to meet you all—"

No matter how late a beautiful girl was, she would be forgiven. While everyone thought she was going to reintroduce herself, she rushed up to Yue Tui and grasped his hands, her eyes sparkling.

"Wah! It's a Westerner like me! From the time I came to this place, this is the first time I spoke with another Westerner!"

Judging by her face's slightly pink tint, she must have been very happy to see someone of her own race in a different land.

On the contrary, Yue Tui's reaction wasn't as animated. He was dazed from the beginning, and only smiled after a while. He flawlessly removed his hands from her grasp as well.

"What's your name?"

Although Yue Tui's attitude wasn't as passionate as hers, she didn't feel rejected.

"... Yue Tui."

Yue Tui paused for a little before answering her question. This time, Bi Rou was stunned.

"What is it?"

"No... It's just that your name has the character 'yue'<sup>18</sup>. It's very uncommon in the Eastern City..."

After quickly explaining, she found herself a place to sit.

"What was everyone chatting about? Let's continue!"

And so the conversation they left hanging started again. During this period, Fan Tong didn't participate, but rather sat quietly by the side thinking about various things.

Seeing more people, Fan Tong noticed that New Residents composed of quite a lot of young people. Young boys and girls in their teens weren't rare, and there were even little children. This fact really induced sighs.

These people all died before being lured here. In their original world, they didn't live long and their life had already left them.

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<sup>18</sup> Yue, from his name, is the Chinese character 月, which means moon.



Fan Tong didn't know if his emotions now were that of sadness or pity.

Though, he might be pitying himself just a bit more. Just how did he die?! This was ridiculous!

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He wasn't sure if this counted as having a wish come true, but once Fan Tong thought of this matter, Cute Girl A opened her mouth, smiling innocently.

"How about we all share how we died in our original world?"

Fan Tong almost choked on his own spit. Yue Tui thought this topic was incredibly preposterous and turned his head towards Fan Tong.

"Isn't this a very serious matter? How can we use this as such a carefree topic for chitchat...?"

*Don't ask me. Before that, please give me some time, so that I can make up a cause of death for myself...*

Due to the fact that Cute Girl A and Cute Girl B held staggering interest towards this topic, and because the others didn't seem to dislike the idea, everyone sat in their seats and began to talk, starting from the guys from room 449.

"I suffocated to death when I curled myself in my bed. The weather was too cold."

*It's not that I wanted to say this, but fellow classmate, that's a really dumb way to die.*

"My greatest regret was that I couldn't see the last episode to my favorite drama. When it was going to end the day after tomorrow too--"

*The things you added just made it sound even sillier... Actually, could we have come from the same world? Or maybe your world has technology too?*

"I died from eating too much crab."

*How can you die from eating too much crab? Please explain? Also, just how many crabs did you eat?*

"I guess my last wish was to eat another one..."

*How much do you like crab, really? Were you entering a crab eating contest?*

"One day, I think I wanted to find out what insecticide tasted like, so I died from drinking a bottle."

*Of course you would die from that. Did you think you'd be fine because you weren't a bug? Well then, what flavor was it?*

"I was very regretful when I was dying. If only I had just drank half a bottle, I wouldn't have died..."

*Nah, I think you'd have died either way. And even if you didn't die from drinking that, you'd probably try out other brands until you did die. Why are all of you so weird?*

"It's my turn now. My heart suddenly stopped, so I died."

Cute Girl A raised her right hand, blinking her eyes wittily.

*Hm, why did I suddenly think your death had something to do with that god of the new world... No, forget it. Pretend I didn't say anything.*

"I think I was in a vegetative state since I was born, and finally died after sixteen years."

*Is that so? You're very healthy now. I'm happy for you.*

"Eh? Is it my turn? How did I die, is it? Well, that's not very important. I've forgotten about it for a long time now, hahaha."

Like that, Bi Rou quickly passed it on.

*Miss, you were a bit too happy and positive when talking about your death, weren't you? There wasn't an ounce of sadness.*

"I died when I tried to teleport and failed."

*Zhu Sha calmly verbalized. This cause of death sounds quite mysterious.*

"How exactly did you die?"

"Well, the teleportation failed, so I couldn't move my entire body to the other side. My body was chopped in half, and I died. This is purely an academic failure on my part, so I must cleanse myself of this stain and properly learn the skills of this world."

*Not wanting to repeat history is a very good idea... Eh? It's my turn?*

"I don't know how I died..."

The "I forgot" reason had already been used by Bi Rou. She was a beautiful girl, so no one complained even when she passed it on with that, but if Fan Tong said the same type of stage line, everyone'd hiss at him.

*Good thing it didn't flip this time. It should be fine this way, right?*

"Fan Tong, you have no sincerity at all--"

"I know right--"

*Hahahaha. I really don't know...*

"I was murdered."

The last person to go was Yue Tui. When he plainly said the sentence, everyone gasped and responded with curious eyes.

Yue Tui didn't want to say it originally, but he wanted to cooperate with the crowd when everyone said theirs. Now, everyone seemed to want to know more, making him wrinkle his brows.

"It's so vague to only say you were murdered. What exactly happened?"

The one who asked was Bi Rou. Yue Tui was baffled for a moment again. He put on a grave expression and began to speak in a solemn tone.

"Do you want to know?"

He asked, watching everyone's expressions. He slowly moved his hand to the pit of his torso.

"The first blade, cut me from here, to the side of my stomach."

The room suddenly fell quiet. His pale right hand then shifted to the right side of his chest.

"The second blade, stabbed through here."

Everyone's faces gradually changed. The girls even turned a bit pale. Yue Tui continued, as if he didn't see everyone's reactions.

"I was really weak at that time. I wanted to turn and run for help, but the third sliced off my two legs. He then used the sword and pierced the palm of my right hand, nailing me to the floor."

His articulation didn't carry any emotion, as though he wasn't talking about himself.

"He then clenched my neck with his two hands, squeezing it tighter, inch by inch. He said to me, 'If only you didn't exist.' I used my left hand, wanting to free his fingers from their grasp. I wanted to speak, but he didn't let me. He said it was my fault I left an opening. It was my fault I gave him this opportunity, and death is the price I'd have to pay..."

At this time, Cute Girl A cried out in a loud wail, disrupting Yue Tui's voice.

"I'm sorry! I didn't know... Everyone looked so gentle and bright, and didn't seem to have any tragic pasts. That's why I thought it would be fine to ask about everyone's cause of death... I'm so sorry!"

She unceasingly apologized. The people nearby patted her back and tried comforting her. Fan Tong really didn't know what to say upon seeing such a situation. He never thought that was how Yue Tui died either.

Then this was considered a tragic death, right? Who was the one that killed him?

Perhaps the girl thought she hurt Yue Tui again, making him saying those things, but Fan Tong believed Yue Tui said it that way on purpose. Although he didn't know the reason why, Yue Tui suddenly wanted to illustrate his death scene like a masochist.

"The one who should say sorry is me."

When Yue Tui said those words, his tone was very plain.

"I shouldn't have said those things that made everyone uncomfortable... let's talk about something else."

In other words, he didn't plan on saying any more. In reality, it wasn't fitting to continue with the room's atmosphere now.

"Uhm... did you guys undergo any transmutations?"

The male from room 449 threw out a vocabulary term no one had heard before all of a sudden. The others asked him what it meant.

"Transmutations are when your soul undergoes some sort of qualitative change because of persistent desires or certain special circumstances during that period when you were being lured to Huan Shi, and you end up with a new supernatural power. Do you guys have any?"

This sort of sounds like a buy one get one free deal, and, once again, Fan Tong found himself never catching such luck.

"Aye, no wonder I felt my appetite became smaller!"

*That's not a supernatural power. That's the public rations being too nasty.*

"So it was like this. I was wondering when I got these strange new powers..."

Zhu Sha nodded his head, but he didn't say what powers those were.

"I don't feel stuffed no matter how much I eat. I wish I had a more useful power."

The boy who started the conversation voiced. *Hm... This power does sound pretty useless. Even if he really likes to eat, he still can't eat anything good without money. He shouldn't have an interest in eating much of those public rations, right?*

No one else jumped into the conversation, so it seemed people who had transmutations weren't that common. No wonder Mi Zhong didn't explain that to him.

His longing to speak properly should be pretty apparent shouldn't it, Fan Tong felt. It'd be something similar to "Please let me speak properly for five minutes before I die," that sort of feeling. Then why couldn't he have a power that allowed him to talk normally for an hour each day? The curse hadn't been lifted. It was as if he died for nothing, as though he used all his savings to buy lottery tickets but none of them won anything, leaving him with only a pile of scrap paper.

The following topics still revolved around school and the teachers, including that mysterious entrance exam for Shufa Xuan.

"So, do any of you know what the entire passage says on the textbook? I only saw one line."

Once Cute Girl B finished, Fan Tong promptly pointed to Yue Tui.

"The teacher said Yue Tui is a prodigy found only once in a thousand years."

That Blind Teacher probably said a hundred years, but it was a figure of speech for boasting, adding on a few years didn't hurt.

And Yue Tui's widened eyes seemed to be saying: Fan Tong, why did you betray me?

“You can see them all, Yue Tui? What did it say?”

Yue Tui broke a pained smile, then pointed at Fan Tong.

“I don’t know how to read the Eastern City’s language. I had Fan Tong translate it, but I’ve already forgotten the contents. You should ask Fan Tong.”

*Just wonderful! You know I can’t speak properly!* Fan Tong gaped at him, frightened.

*If you didn’t point at me, then wouldn’t everything have been fine?* Yue Tui’s eyes appeared to carry a chilly breeze with them.

“Fan Tong, what does the entire passage say, on that textbook?”

Ugh, if a super pretty boy said he forgot, the girls could still forgive him. But if he, whose level of beauty couldn’t beat that bishounen youth, also said he forgot, then they’d definitely jeer at him...

“...See one line, you’re expelled. See two lines, you’re awful. See three lines, no medicine can heal. See no lines, go commit suicide.”

...He could no longer understand the logic behind this curse.

Everybody’s faces looked a little horrible. Cute girl B also looked entirely bewildered.

“But, that wasn’t how the first line went. Did I read it wrong?”

“Fan Tong, stop lying to everyone!”

Zhu Sha’s opinion of him turned for the worse again. By the way, apparently Zhu Sha could see two lines.

It was becoming late, so everyone returned to their own rooms, saying they should chat again the next time they meet.

Fan Tong thought that it’d be nice if he could invite Luo Shi to these meetings.

But that was probably impossible, isn’t it. Those commoners would all become speechless once they saw “Lord Luo Shi”.

### © Fan Tong’s Afterword

There doesn’t seem to be many problems with our new living situation. No need to worry too much about me. Although Zhu Sha is a bit strict, we actually get along quite well in the dorms.

Everyone keeps calling me Fan Tong, Fan Tong. It feels very heart-warming. But, I didn’t neglect the fact that their eyes secretly oozed a strange sort of smile every time they called me... Despicable. I need to seriously curse those who dare to make fun of my name in their hearts. It’s at times like these that I am so glad Yue Tui doesn’t understand the Eastern City’s language.

Only after hearing these things today did I realize that I didn’t really try to understand Yue Tui before.

Or rather, I didn’t really care about his past. Well, I keep thinking that the past is past, you know? The present is more important. Hanging on to things that have already happened doesn’t seem to be of much help, and it’s not like he can change back into whomever he was back then again. And the one I know is the him right now, you know... Was that sentence like a tongue twister? I’m not that hard to understand, am I?

I always assumed he was an independent, self-determined young master, but it sounds like the situation is more complex than I thought. This past week, I’d sometimes find him suddenly waking up, screaming. Could he be seeing memories from his past life and constantly suffering from nightmares?

Zhu Sha didn't ask any more about Yue Tui's state of affairs after we went back to our rooms. I wanted to ask, but really, I didn't know what I could ask.

Asking him about those things, forcing him to remember such painful memories, then comforting him after hurting his feelings; that sounds really excessive, doesn't it?

Dragging on a few more days like so, Chen Yue Jie has finally arrived.

The day before Chen Yue Jie Mi Zhong showed up in front of me again, telling me that since I'm a debtor, the Eastern City has assigned me jobs to shed off some of the money I owe. The first one they assigned was an emergency job for tomorrow's Chen Yue Jie. I'll have to wake up at five in the morning to work.

...What is this! Can't I even participate in a celebration like a regular person?!

# Chapter 5

## Chen Yue Jie

*“If I work hard to become a great man, will there be a Fan Tong Jie in the future?” – Fan Tong*  
*“Is that a day when people have to speak the opposite of what they mean?” – Luo Shi*

To the Eastern City, Chen Yue Jie was a major holiday that happened only once a year. This was also a rare opportunity where the Five Attendants would accompany Queen Xi Ying to see the city's fellow civilians. It was said that the Western City also celebrated a similar holiday on this day, except it was not as highly regarded as in the Eastern City. This was also a reason why the two cities held different attitudes toward Chen Yue.

One could say the Eastern City depended on Chen Yue's power, and thus glorified it as an existence equal to the gods. As for the Western City, their current approach was to seal off the Chen Yue passageway, preventing New Residents from entering. The two sides conflicted on this point and failed to make a consensus, causing open battles to be inevitable. However, even if they started fighting, the Western City still couldn't reach their goal of sealing Chen Yue.

When they first discovered Chen Yue Bao Jing<sup>19</sup>, each side took half of the matrix. Sealing off the Chen Yue pathway required a complete matrix, so as long as Queen Xi Ying possessed half of it, the Western City wouldn't be able to achieve their goal. This was unavoidable and the deadlock created unceasing clashes between the two sides.

Because the Western City made it their goal to seal off Chen Yue, the Eastern City inhabitants regarded the other city as “evil”. Naturally, the Western City thought the opposite. Contradictory opinions would cause those who were obdurate about their beliefs to demonize the other party. Continuing this way and brainwashing other people around them, feelings of animosity naturally multiplied by the day.

Nonetheless, whatever happened in the Western City was none of Eastern City's business. The Eastern City would celebrate its important holiday, and its people had begun to prepare Shen Wang Dian since early morning.

The established agenda included worshipping at the Chen Yue Altar. The altar was situated on the borderline between the Eastern and the Western City, so the worshipping was really only done by the Queen and the Five Attendants, followed by some guards. Most people weren't allowed to attend, not even to watch.

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<sup>19</sup> Chen Yue Mirror. Ancient mirrors in China were made using bronze, were not reflective, and were believed to possess magical properties.

The place where the common residents went to was the road from which the Queen's carriage left Shen Wang Dian, to the gates exiting the city.

In other words, the highlight of Chen Yue Jie for most people was the chance to see Queen Xi Ying and the other dignitaries. Although some were of a different opinion, most agreed that this was a rare opportunity, and even become crazed about it. It was said that to see the Queen's smile was the same as being blessed, and the person would live their entire year smoothly and peacefully. Alas, seeing the Queen smile was extremely difficult. Especially after the Five Attendants became the Four Attendants, a layer of frost shrouded the Queen's already icy appearance.

Once the carriage drove out the gates, it'd head straight toward the Chen Yue Altar. In the city, though, they'd lower the speed, in order for the citizens to cheer and adore. The personage would also be sitting on elevated seats of the carriage, so there wasn't a problem with crowds blocking each other's view. Everyone could see as much as they wanted.

Everyone excitedly anticipated this day, but for Fan Tong, who was forced to do manual labor since five this morning, he was truly cloaked in smoke and miasma.

He heard Zhu Sha and Yue Tui were going to be in the audience in today's event as well. If possible, he also wanted to wake up with them at ten, then hide in the crowds and chat about the Queen and the Five Attendants! Why must he wake up so early in the morning to help pave the roads for pedestrians and act as a human statue? He was even in the same group as Mi Zhong!

"I'm actually in debt too, so I naturally have to work off my debt. Didn't I tell you before?"

Being told that by Mi Zhong, he felt displeased. Quite displeased.

*Who knew you were a debtor? Even if you owe money, that's still not my business. How did you get into debt anyways? You look so slick, a totally wily old bird. You shouldn't have died so easily, right?*

"How did you get into debt?"

"Hm— I was young and didn't know any better, so I followed the fad and tried out different ways to die. Only New Residents can play like this, you know?"

*I didn't know, and don't look at me like we're really close, please?* Subconsciously, Fan Tong wanted to show an expression of disgust.

Today's earnings would settle ten strings worth of debt. The total amount of work would take about seven hours... so the wage in Eastern City was this low?

Counting it this way, if he owed two hundred strings, then he'd repay everything after a hundred forty hours. But in reality, he couldn't count it this way. It was because Chen Yue Jie was a celebration, so in order to make its citizens happy, the city was extra generous in paying today.

According to Mi Zhong, the most common jobs that anyone can do pay about ten qians an hour.

Ten qians is a tenth of one string...

Ten hours make one string.

Two hundred strings of qian would then equal two thousand hours.

So his debt was some kind of astronomical figure!

Knowing this frightened Fan Tong. Only after relishing in his petrified expression did Mi Zhong coolly tell him.

“That’s why you should find jobs that’ll earn you a good pay. Do you reckon gossip’s pretty sweet? Gossip about Lord Luo Shi can usually be sold for six strings. You have to find special buyers for Lord Wei Shi’s gossip, so the prices fluctuate. There’s too much gossip on Lord Yin Shi already, so information about him are worthless. If you have gossip on Lord Ling Shi, you can sell it for at least twenty strings! Those with more truth to it, you could even sell directly to me. I’ll pay forty strings!”

Mi Zhong crossed his arms around Fan Tong’s shoulders, whispering into his ear this sort of illegal conspiracy. Fan Tong thought his face was going to turn black.

*Just how obsessed are you with Lord Ling Shi?*

“Speaking of which, what about gossip about the Queen?”

He only wanted to ask out of curiosity, not so that he could sell it.

“The Queen’s gossip! You have good eyes! Because the difficulty to get this is so high, it’s basically priceless. And more importantly, it’s alright to sell gossip about the Attendants, aside from Lord Wei Shi being a bit dangerous, since the others don’t really care. However, if you sold gossip about the Queen and got caught, you could be sentenced to death and be killed by a soul purging weapon. I don’t lack money to such an extent that I’d have to resort to that. The risk is a bit too high.”

*Queen Xi Ying is so strict. She must not like others talking about her.*

“If you have any information on Lord Hui Shi, it should be very valuable as well, since no one knows where he went... If you have anything on him, no matter how much it costs, Lord Luo Shi would buy it.”

Fan Tong could tell how deeply Luo Shi cared for Hui Shi just from hearing Mi Zhong words.

“You guys have services selling gossip to the Attendants as well, huh?”

“Yes! For instance, Lord Wei Shi would buy gossip on Lord Yin Shi and Lord Ling Shi, given that they’re at wrong ends with each other. But who’d want to sell to him? That’s why I only sell him the useless information.”

Mm, seems like the New Residents hate Lord Wei Shi for being biased, and his popularity with the other Attendants weren’t very good either.

“Seeing as how Lord Hui Shi isn’t coming back, I wonder if the Queen’s going to choose a new Attendant...”

*That’s still not the most important matter. Rather, I want to know why you’re still in debt, when you should’ve sold a lot of gossip already. Just how much do you owe? Were you the one who regenerated with pain greater than that of a woman giving birth?*

It was almost time for the carriage to leave Shen Wang Dian. They had to stop their private conversation, obediently act as human statues, and wait for the arrival of the Queen’s carriage.

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The carriage departed Shen Wang Dian ten minutes behind schedule, but no one felt anxious while waiting, as if they’re already used to this kind of thing. Fan Tong even heard a voice behind him saying, “If they’re late, it’s probably all thanks to Lord Yin Shi being problematic again”, and other mystifying declarations similar to that. Speaking of which, of the Five Attendants, he still hadn’t seen Yin Shi and Wei Shi. When they showed up later, he ought to look, and check them out.



At the very head of the carriage sat Queen Xi Ying herself, a cold beauty as expected. She was a figure of black elegance, and even the makeup on her face all used cool colors. Her long black hair hung loosely, only held by a servant girl kneeling beside her. She wore a silver head piece as accessory, and her entire body emitted the presence of a goddess who controlled all that was beneath her.

This strict and icy image truly displayed a queen's authority. If one stood face to face with her, it'd be difficult for a person's legs not to become shaky from her gaze.

Even without mention of the pure black tassel, Fan Tong instinctively knew that she was definitely not someone to mess with.

Sitting behind the queen was Luo Shi, the guy Fan Tong had seen and talked with a few times before. Although today was an important holiday, his clothes were the same as always. Then again, he usually wore high-quality clothing anyways, so it wasn't unfitting.

From this angle, Luo Shi still looked delicate and pretty. Though that small fold locked between his brows still lingered there, most likely because he still hadn't thought through the matter about Hui Shi. That wasn't something others can get their hands into though.

Following in order, Fan Tong saw the person he had met once before, Ling Shi. Only now, to his horror, did he discover that Ling Shi's tassel was a grey-black color, only one sub-level away from pure black. He was also one with a lot of influence.

That was true. How could the rector of Fuzhou Xuan not be powerful?

Mi Zhong seemed to have already turned cross-eyed from staring at Ling Shi's beautiful form, and naturally, Fan Tong didn't want to deal with him. His line of sight moved to the other man next to Ling Shi.

Just by looking at him, the young man wearing a head of long black hair looked handsome enough to attract most of the female population's attention. A striking appearance paired with a light smile, he'd more than likely strike down a good collection of girls. There was no need for clarification. This man had to be Yin Shi, not Wei Shi. If Wei Shi looked like this, half the people who hate him would jump ship, that half being females.

But this charming, handsome image was almost utterly destroyed when he started turbulently shaking Ling Shi's shoulders while saying something in full excitement. Ling Shi immediately scolded him, thus reverting him back to his original state, but... no one was blind here. Everyone saw it.

Yin Shi was Shufa Xuan's rector, so he shouldn't be weak... *Eh? There's no tassel?*

Fan Tong looked at Yin Shi from head to toe. There really was no tassel. No tassel to be found.

Not only did he not find a tassel, he couldn't find Wei Shi either. No matter where he searched on the carriage trail, Wei Shi's person was nowhere to be found. Although he didn't want to speak with the love-possessed Mi Zhong, Fan Tong still called out to him.

"Mi Zhong, how come Lord Wei Shi..."

"Ah, who cares about Lord Wei Shi? He's probably been murdered and had his corpse obliterated or something. It's more important to look at Lord Ling Shi right now. Go go go. Move aside."

"..."

Even though they were both humans, and even though Fan Tong spoke correctly, they still could not communicate with each other. Fan Tong fully felt the girth of this harbor.

It was basically two different worlds between the civilian spectators and the people atop the carriages.



When the carriage troupe first came out, Yin Shi still docilely maintained his image, sitting upright and beaming congenial smiles. Not long after, though, his true nature began to leak out.

“Ling Shi! Look! So many pretty ladies are yelling for me!”

“...”

After being intensely shaken by the other for a while, Ling Shi thought his hair had almost turned to a mess. With a darkening of the eye, Ling Shi proceeded to attack Yin Shi’s lower ribs at flying speed, causing Yin Shi to instantly shut up from the pain.

“We’ve only been out for only one minute! Don’t lose your image after just one minute! At least try to care for the others’ images!”

Although every one of Ling Shi’s words was severe, they were only said as loudly as Yin Shi and he alone could hear. As for whether or not the citizens underneath could read lips, that was another matter.

Experiencing an act of violence, Yin Shi stayed obedient for a while, giving the smile that hosts gave and displaying an air of elegance. But, in less than two minutes, it was gone again.

“Ling Shi! Look! So many guys are drooling at you! Pffthahahahaha—”

While Ling Shi pondered on whether he should directly knock this guy off the car, Luo Shi also turned his head slightly towards them.

“Yin Shi, you’re noisy.”

Saying he was noisy, Yin Shi’s words actually weren’t that audible amidst the cheers and cries of the crowds. However, to those on the carriages nearby, he spoke very clearly.

“Xiao Luo Shi<sup>20</sup>, Why are you also...?”

Yin Shi put on a hurt expression. Luo Shi followed by turning his head back, ignoring him.

“Ah! Ignoring me! Towards one’s own teacher, that sort of attitude isn’t cute at all!”

“Ling Shi, can you shut him up now?”

“I tried over a hundred times.”

“Then can you knock him out?”

“I can’t fight in a public event. That’s too unmannered.”

Although Ling Shi had done so earlier, no one probably saw it under the protection of those big sleeves, so that didn’t count.

“Yin, can’t you hold it until we pass the gates?”

“Ah? What?”

After Yin Shi finished saying what he had to say, he continued to wink at the beautiful girls in the masses and completely failed to notice what the others were saying.

“...You’re really not going to hit him?”

Luo Shi’s face twitched.

“You hit him. I won’t stop you.”

Even if Ling Shi said that, there was still no way Luo Shi could do it. If he really were to, there was still the question of whether he could hit him or not.

Luckily Wei Shi felt a little unwell today and took leave. If he also sat in the carriage, Wei Shi definitely wouldn’t give way to such churlish behavior. The two of them would argue subsequently, making the scene all the more unbearable to watch.

Something like this happened five years ago. In the end, Yin Shi immaturely cast Shufa to shave a chunk of Wei Shi’s hair off. Wei Shi fought him in anger; Ling Shi watched; Luo Shi

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<sup>20</sup> A Chinese honorific. He’s basically saying “Luo Shi-chan”.

was overwhelmed. Finally, Xi Ying awarded each person with a slap to the face, and the two calmed down under the Queen's fury.

Wei Shi's hair had naturally grown back by now, but that didn't mean that the face he lost, and the fact that he was put to shame, could easily be forgotten. There was a lot of tension between those two already, so putting them in the same car together honestly made others worry.

Yin Shi's personality was more easygoing. If he said he didn't mind, then he really didn't mind. Even if he did say he would get back at you, more than half the time, Yin Shi forgot about it in the end. As for Wei Shi, he was the begrudging type. Annoying a narrow minded person accomplished nothing, so Ling Shi and Luo Shi usually just watched from a safe distance. If Yin Shi wanted to crash himself into a cactus, that was his problem.

The journey to the Chen Yue Alter was a difficult one every year. Today they left ten minutes behind schedule, because Yin Shi was not only late but had even carelessly teleported to the wrong place. At any rate, Yin Shi was the type of person who would stupidly muddle up things that people generally didn't mess up. Granted, everyone had gotten used to this after associating with him for so long, but, rather than purely accepting it, everyone continued to hope that Yin Shi would change a bit.

After they uneasily toiled through the road and left the gates, the carriages also gained speed. Logically, no matter what improper thing Yin Shi did, it shouldn't matter anymore, but he actually quieted down, feeling bored from the lack of the crowds' attention.

It was impossible to keep him quiet when it was necessary, yet once the pressure was gone, Yin Shi became an obedient angel. No one knew what to do with him.

"Haah, I'm so bored. I don't know what to do."

Yin Shi sighed. He always found riding a car very boring, very quickly.

*Please don't do anything—!* Luo Shi and Ling Shi simultaneously cried inside.

"Ling Shi, have you done anything fun lately? After we've finished, we should head over to Void Space Area 2! I heard people found new species of moshou there. I want to catch one and see for myself."

"Have you forgotten the commotion you created the last time you rode a moshou home? Yin Shi."

"I've learned from past mistakes. This time, I've brought ropes with me, so it should work out much more smoothly. See."

Yin Shi took out the ropes and showed them to Ling Shi. There was no longer anyone who wanted to ask him why he carried this sort of thing on him.

"Your heart was never on the ritual and only cared about going out to play..."

"Life is too boring. You can't blame me. The ritual's the same every year, isn't it? There's no originality at all."

"The meaning behind this ritual's existence isn't so that you can have fun."

"Ah, Ling Shi, the clouds are so pretty today, look."

Communication was impossible.

"Yin, you can't be saved."

"Ah, don't say random things that'd make Xi Ying get the wrong impression of me."

Actually, Xi Ying, who was sitting in front the whole time, probably heard every line from beginning to end.

It was just that her face still had her usual stern, icy appearance, and remained silent.

"Or, we could ask Ying if she wants to join us in catching moshou? Do you think she'll go with us?"

“If Ying would go with you, I’ll be a woman starting today.”

“Eh? Then the chances are pretty high, aren’t they? Xiao Luo Shi, could you help me ask her?”

“...”  
“...”

Luo Shi and Ling Shi both were speechless.

“Ling Shi, you’re really not going with me? I thought you were free?”

“Even if I have nothing to do, I don’t need to go with you.”

“Come help me and I’ll take you to Void Space Area 1 to catch tabby cats next time.”

“...Are you still hoping that I want you to take me and catch tabby cats?”

To be able to associate with Yin Shi for so long in peace, Ling Shi’s patience wouldn’t be a normal level either.

“More importantly, when did Void Space Area 1 start to have tabby cats...”

Luo Shi couldn’t hold it and mended the question. Just from hearing the name of the location, one could tell that place couldn’t produce tabby cats. In the beginning, Void Space was a highly dangerous magnetic field, not to mention the life forms living there. As a Natural Resident who couldn’t revive, only Yin Shi would run rampant in that area.

Promising someone to catch tabby cats where there weren’t any, that in itself had no sincerity.

“Ah, are there no tabby cats in Void Space Area 1?”

Stunned for a moment, Yin Shi lowered his head to think quietly.

“Then what was that thing I caught last time...”

*So you can’t even identify a tabby cat?*

No one had the energy to say that sentence anymore.

“Ling Shi, you’re really not accompanying me? It’s really difficult for me to do this alone.”

“If you only put in a bit of effort, how could there be any problems?”

“It’s really tiring.”

“You want to go play yet you still complain that it’s tiring? What do you want me there for, to be your mule?”

Yin Shi looked over for a few seconds, and then scratched his face with his fingers.

“You just have to help me hold the moshou down and let me wrap the rope around it, that’s all.”

“Go die.”

Finding Ling Shi to play this kind of thing, of course the issue would end here.

“There’s Luo Shi, why don’t you ask him?”

“Xiao Luo Shi? Then I have to be even more serious and get even more tired.”

In other words, he has to multitask and protect Luo Shi as well. Naturally, Luo Shi felt displeased once he heard it, but he didn’t rebut right away.

“Luo Shi, act like a spoiled child and tell him to take you. Say, ‘Yin Shi—I’ve wanted to go to Void Space Area 2 for a long time now. Take me there, won’t you?’ Like that. Try saying it.”

Ling Shi prodded Luo Shi. Because he knew Yin Shi’s weak points, creating trouble for him like this only made Ling Shi feel joy without tire.

“Ah! No! That’s cowardly! Ling Shi you have no shame!”

Yin Shi promptly refused in horror. Luo Shi shined a fake smile and spoke.

“You think I can say that out loud?”

“You say it once and I’ll tell you where Hui Shi went.”

“.....!”

Luo Shi’s expression instantly changed. Yin Shi also turned grim.

“Don’t use something like this to joke with Luo Shi.”

Ling Shi didn’t say much. He simply looked to the front and changed the topic.

“We’re almost there. Prepare to get off.”

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On the outskirts of the altar lay a barrier protecting Chen Yue. Their transportation was unable to pass through this barrier and had to be left outside. They were forced to tread the rest of the way on foot from there onwards. Those who had accompanied the Queen had now taken the responsibility of being her bodyguards.

After descending from the carriage, Ling Shi had become aware of an anomaly with Yin Shi. He appeared to be missing something, but it was more than just one something.

“Yin, where’s your plate?”

A plate was something only “Shi” have the right to wear. The plates also acted as a person’s identification, carved with the beholder’s name. Each plate was unique to its owner. For instance, Ling Shi’s plate<sup>21</sup> was created from a black-blue stone embedded with tiny sparkles, while Luo Shi’s plate<sup>22</sup> was made from a green stone that had a sense of transparency to it.

“Hmm...”

Yin Shi looked at himself and replied without delay.

“I lost it.”

“Lost it? Do you realize how many cases a year are about people who use your plate and steal your identity to commit crimes?”

Ling Shi frowned, immediately raising a problem on another matter.

“Where’s your tassel?”

Yin Shi looked at himself once again, realizing the issue.

“Ah, I lost that too.”

“... Can you look after the things that symbolize your identity and status a little better? Do you know how many times you’ve lost them already? If you keep losing things, issuing new ones probably isn’t the best answer, now is it?”

Ling Shi couldn’t help but nag a bit. Yin Shi waved his hands with no feeling of repent whatsoever.

“Ah, so annoying, Shut your mouth in front of my majesty, geezer.”

“...”

In a situation where the Queen could clearly hear him, he still publicly used such an honorific on himself, completely unafraid of being disrespectful. Only he could act in such a manner.

<sup>21</sup> The stone Ling Shi, 綾石 (Aventurine) is homonym to Ling Shi (綾侍).

<sup>22</sup> 珞 is often understood to be from 璅珞 (yīng luò), a jade or pearl necklace. Luo Shi’s plate is chosen to be green here most likely because of the famous phrase: 碌碌如玉, 珞珞如石 (lùlùrúyù, luòluòrúshí), a phrase from a famous ancient Chinese philosopher, Laozi. It means, “The (wise ones) do not wish to show themselves as elegant-looking as jade, but prefer to be as coarse-looking as ordinary stones.”

Although the conversation was becoming more and more outrageous, Xi Ying continued to ignore it. To be honest, the Queen's apathy had worsened over these past two years. One would wonder if she was simply cold or if this was the sign of a lifeless heart.

When she arrived at the inner level of the Chen Yue barrier, Xi Ying halted and then turned towards those behind her.

"Wait for me outside."

It was like this every year. Once they had reached the inner barrier level, only the Queen entered. The rest of them had to wait outside for Her Majesty to finish the ceremony before escorting her back.

"Ying, come back quickly, okay? I'm super bored."

Of course Yin Shi's declaration was ignored. Xi Ying unemotionally blinked her eyes and walked inside.

"Ling Shi, my heart feels cold. Ying is being so distant."

"I've heard this sentence at least a hundred times before. Aren't you sick of saying it?"

"Xiao Luo Shi, my heart feels cold. Ling Shi is being so distant."

"Do you need a Driven Fire spell?"

Looks like Yin Shi wouldn't be receiving any comfort here.

Shortly after Xi Ying entered the inner level, Yin Shi yawned and suddenly turned his head in a certain direction, then began to speak with Ling Shi.

"Ling Shi, we should return to the barrier's outer level. Let's go."

"Mm."

Whatever Yin Shi noticed, Ling Shi noticed it too. Luo Shi felt nothing in particular and puzzlingly asked.

"Then I...?"

"Ah, how about you wait here for us. Otherwise, Ying would feel lonely if she sees nobody here when she comes out."

Who would be lonely? Were those guards not people?

Most likely everyone wanted to correct him, but if they did, they'd feel as idiotic as him. It became a situation fit only for silence.

By the time Yin Shi and Ling Shi returned to the outer edge of the barrier, the carriages' guards were already nervously facing people who were obviously from the Western City. Seeing Yin Shi and Ling Shi arrive, they finally breathed sighs of relief.

It was natural that they would be nervous. Even if they didn't know what the important figures of Luo Yue looked like, they still understood the proofs of ability dangling from the waists of those two people, who were currently sitting atop some sort of special beast.

Three gold threads and two gold threads.

These were the Western City's top two ranks. Not to mention, there was another reason they were a cause of fear.

In the group, a youth of a rather young age had his face concealed under cloth.

A person who had three golden threads and had been known to always hide his face... With these two characteristics, the people of the Eastern City automatically recognized that legendary monster.

It was the Emperor of Luo Yue, Englar.

"Ah, are the people from Luo Yue going to perform a ceremony at Chen Yue Altar this holiday as well? Although, it probably won't be as grand."

Yin Shi looked over, casually uttering the words.

*Even His Majesty Himself came, and yet you say that it won't be grand?*

Many people had that question but didn't know how to voice it. It was true that they looked much plainer in comparison. The Eastern City made an imposing group with its Queen, Attendants, and various accompanying guards, while they only had two people.

"Yin Shi, it's you again."

The guy next to the face-covered youth said in displeasure. His hair color was a darker gold, his eyes a beautiful jade green. His face was handsome, but the expression on him looked as though everyone owed him millions' worth of money. Yin Shi really wanted to try giving the guy a few millions and see if his face would change a bit, but of course, this sort of thinking was immediately shot down by Ling Shi.

Naturally, the languages spoken by The Western City and The Eastern City were different. While New Residents could communicate perfectly thanks to Chen Yue's influence, the Natural Residents had to learn the other city's language in order to understand them.

Right now, that golden-haired male was speaking in The Western City's tongue. Whether he could actually speak The Eastern City's language or not, he wouldn't speak in someone else's tongue and communicate, especially with the two cities' unfriendly terms with each other.

"Yin, what is he saying?"

Yin Shi seemed to understand a bit of The Western City's language. Ling Shi knew nothing, since he felt that there was no need to talk with people from Luo Yue. If anything didn't fit to his eye, he'd just finish them.

"Ah, he's saying he's really happy to see me."

*Lord Yin Shi, could you not translate the words however you want just because Lord Ling Shi doesn't understand?* All of the Eastern City's New Residents, who could understand everything, felt this way.

"You're lying."

Ling Shi didn't need to know the language to know that was a lie.

"Ah? Then he must be saying he's really happy to see you."

Yin Shi blinked his eyes and replied as so.

"Lord Ling Shi, allow me to translate for you!" was the collective thought of all the New Residents. However, taking initiative without an order was considered disrespectful, so they refrained.

"I feel unhappy just listening to you..."

Ling Shi's expression fell cold, and then glanced at the golden-haired youth. He and his enemy actually shared the same feelings for once.

He already felt unhappy, so the other side must feel even worse.

"Forget it, I don't want to know what he said."

"Ah, you don't want to know? But I really want to translate."

Yin Shi looked incredibly disappointed. The look made Ling Shi want to punch him.

"No need. Just kill them all."

Ling Shi's reply was direct enough. The New Residents listening from the side sweated a body of cold sweat.

"Ling Shi, don't resort to violence and killing so easily. That's not good."

Yin Shi actually made a stern face and scolded him. That made Ling Shi feel even more displeased.

"Is this how Ye Zhi's Queen teaches her subordinates? They clearly know our King is here, yet they have no manners at all?"



The golden-haired youth seemed to be able to understand a bit of the Eastern language, but he still spoke using the Western language.

Ye Zhi was what The Western City's commonly called The Eastern City, the same way they called the other side Luo Yue.

"Oh, but he has to be the real deal this time for that to happen, you know? Just how many times has Englar used substitutes? Anyone could wear embroidery of three gold threads. He hasn't brought out Tian Luo Yan or Aifroa. Doesn't seem convincing enough."

Yin Shi quickly replied in fluent Western tongue, mostly because he wanted the other to understand him. He didn't think "speaking The Western City's language to the Western City was an insult to The Eastern City".

But this time, Ling Shi couldn't hear what he was saying.

"Does Ye Zhi's Queen always come in full armor to the Chen Yue Altar?"

The golden-haired male icily smiled. He meant to say, couldn't they say the same for The Eastern City, since Xi Ying hadn't worn Qian Huan Hua or brought Skies with her.

"Ah, that's a good question. Wait a moment, let me think..."

"Boss, could you not neglect me and start chatting with the enemy?"

Ling Shi mercilessly slammed a pat on Yin Shi's back.

"Ah! Ouch! You violent geezer! You were the one who said you didn't want to hear or need me to translate!"

"How dutiful of you. Then I say I want to hit you now, so stay quiet obediently and let me beat you up."

"I'm sending a complaint! I'm going to tell Ying! You call me Boss and yet you don't respect me at all!"

"I think you should keep a check on yourself instead of complaining, Boss."

"I'll remember this!"

Something like "I'll remember this" should be said to one's enemies, not one's comrades, right?

"If you guys have nothing to say, then we'll be going in."

The golden-haired male didn't look like he wanted to deal with their ridiculousness anymore either, clearly wanting to draw a line between them.

"No, Ying is inside, so you guys can't go in. This is a matter of status, unless you can prove to us he's really Luo Yue's Emperor."

Hearing the golden-haired youth's words, Yin Shi automatically paused in his squabble with Ling Shi and replied firmly.

"How can our King be inspected by the subordinates of our enemies? Or should I say, what right do you have to ask us for proof?"

How insulting would it be if the Western City's Emperor had to prove himself just because the Easterners were doubtful of his identity?

"I heard Luo Yue's Emperor is being controlled by his subordinates anyways. Why don't you tell him to show us proof?"

Yin Shi always said things casually, but this time, he actually flavored the words with an insult to the other side's king. The golden-haired male's expression changed.

"I demand that you apologize to His Majesty for such uncouth behavior!"

"Why? In case he gets in a bad mood and won't use his blood to revive you the next time you die? But the one here isn't the real king anyways, so what are you afraid of?"

"You--"

When the verbal argument was about to become physical, that face-covered youth who hadn't spoken a word since the beginning suddenly made a hand motion to stop the golden-haired man.

"Let's go, we're leaving."

His voice was pushed very low, so low there didn't seem to be changes in tone. Hearing his instructions, the golden-haired young man glared widely, feeling averse and not understanding why they had to tolerate those Easterners. Still, he followed orders. The golden-haired youth directed the flying beast he rode on and turned around to the other young man's direction.

"We won't let you go so easily next time!"

At the same time he finished his sentence, the two beasts they were riding on started flapping their wings, leaving in the direction in which they came.

"Ah, Ling Shi, what do you think would happen if we snapped their control ropes with a rock right now? It sounds really interesting."

Although Yin Shi didn't like killing and murdering, he found little pranks truly appealing.

"Why don't you try it?"

Ling Shi wouldn't stop him from things that scheme against the enemy. It'd be even better if they fell and broke all their bones, saving them time from having to kill them the next time they meet. How bothersome would that be?

"But what if he fell and died? He probably wouldn't accept my apology. I'd better not."

"..."

Who cared if the enemy died or not?

"Lord Yin Shi, is that really not Luo Yue's Emperor...?"

A New Resident finally took up the courage to ask. Yin Shi always had a good personality and never really puts himself on a pedestal. A simple question doesn't hurt.

"Hm? I don't think he is. He wasn't imposing enough. An Emperor who's had the ability to slaughter thirty-thousand people on his own even five years ago, logically, people should shiver once they see him. But I didn't find that person earlier scary at all. Ah, but master fighters are also adept at hiding their ability, so it was uncertain really. Nothing happened in the end anyways, haha."

If something did happen, then that'd be too late you know.

"Ling Shi, Ling Shi, let's go to Void Space Area 2 and capture some moshou. Let's go."

"...Ying is still inside. Not to mention, have you forgotten that I already rejected you?"

To meet someone like him, Ling Shi felt genuinely helpless.

### © Fan Tong's Afterword

And that's how I passed the first major holiday of Eastern City—by selling labor.

If I simply celebrated the day, I would feel much happier, wouldn't I? Sadly, I guess the phrase "The skies never listen" is engraved on my body. Although my business was to help others change their luck back then, I just can't change my own—

Speaking of which, it's been half a month now. Everything's still slowly sinking in. My ability to adapt is very strong. I'm not some kind of greenhouse flower, don't look down on me.

What green house rice... that just destroys the feel. Would people put a bucket of rice in a greenhouse?

Is there a need to put a rice bucket there? You think I don't have this kind of common sense? How rude.

I only know of one holiday in The Eastern City right now, Chen Yue Jie. I wonder what other ones there are?

...It couldn't be that I'd have to do manual labor every time there's a holiday thanks to my debt? That's just too sad, isn't it? Can't they just let me celebrate a holiday once! Ah? I can celebrate once I clear up my debt in ten years? By then, the holidays wouldn't feel fresh anymore! The first time is very important! Do you get me! The first time!

If you don't get it, whatever. I didn't expect you guys to. All my firsts have already been ruined by fate, the first time I died, the first time I went to school, the first time...Whaaa...

# Chapter 6

## Don't Forget You're a Student Even After Break

*"Don't forget your job even after capturing a moshou, sigh." –Ling Shi*

*"So you accompanied him in the end..." –Luo Shi*

After the carriages left the gates, it was up to Fan Tong's group of manual laborers to scatter the crowds and clean the streets. It was about time for lunch when everything had been finished. After making sure he repaid seven strings of debt, Fan Tong wanted to head straight home and rest, but Mi Zhong said the state prepared meals for the workers to reward them for their work, so Fan Tong supposed that he might as well follow him.

Although what they got was no more than a less than large boxed meal, the dishes in it were actually normal. This meal had beaten the usual provisions by manifold. So Fan Tong felt quite content. He took his food and sat down on the side with Mi Zhong to eat.

"Sigh- Lord Ling Shi is as beautiful this year as he was last year. When can I finally climb up in rankings and see him-?"

After Mi Zhong saw Ling Shi, he felt his soul being comforted, yet become emptier. Speaking of which, Fan Tong never heard of how Mi Zhong's training had been faring.

If he was also deemed a block of wood "with no chance in this entire lifetime", then Fan Tong might see him differently. After all, they'd be peas of the same pod.

"Fan Tong, you've finally seen the big shots. Any thoughts or feelings?"

It seemed Mi Zhong found this topic to be great for creating conversation, so he casually asked Fan Tong.

*Thoughts or feelings? Do you seriously hope for me to say, "Lord Ling Shi is so beautiful. I'm going to join Lord Ling Shi's fanclub now," or something? That sort of thing? Do you think that's possible? I'm still not mentally prepared to engage in activities with rabid fanboys."*

"Uhm... not really."

"What? Nothing? Fan Tong, you're such a boring person!"

Mi Zhong's tone made it sound like he treaded on a taboo. Was it so serious?

Forcing some thoughts out wouldn't be impossible, as long as the words didn't flip on him again.

"The queen... her tassel is really such a color."

He didn't dare say black. It'd be disastrous if it turned out white.

"What such a color? Isn't it just pure black? Kings are always really strong you know."

"Oh? Then Luo Yue's Emperor...?"

"Oh, that monster of an Emperor? Of course his is three gold threads."

Mi Zhong had explained to him the ranking system in The Western City. If he remembered correctly, the strongest would be three lines embroidered in gold... three gold threads was probably the abbreviation?

"Pervert?"

"Not pervert, but monster. But it's about the same. Anyways, he's someone no one wants to mess with."

It sounded like there could more to this. Fan Tong became interested in listening.

"Why do you hear that?"

"You can't tell the difference between say and hear? Whatever, since I'm feeling pretty good from seeing Lord Ling Shi today, I'll tell you about what happened in the past."

Mi Zhong coughed and then started telling the story.

"Five years ago, our Eastern City was at its peak of progress. The country was vast, the people were strong. At that time, all five of the Attendants were there. Despite Lord Luo Shi being a cute little child still, Lord Hui Shi already possessed a good amount of skill, and Lord Ling Shi was as beautiful and amazing as he is now. Lord Wei Shi had the same irritable face..."

Just hearing the beginning, Fan Tong almost wanted to ask if the other had a part-time job as a storyteller. By the time it got to the end though, he figured that probably wasn't the case. He was already running way off topic now, right? There probably wouldn't be many people supporting this stylistic presentation.

"At that time, Luo Yue couldn't even match up to us, no matter it be the worth of their people or the quality of the King's subordinates. That year, Queen Xi Ying called war against Luo Yue and soldiers filled the cities. Sigh, to be frank with you, wars actually erupt every few years or so. I've even heard rumors saying that if we win, they'd let us choose between reviving back into our original world and getting certified as a Natural Resident.

*Whoa! That nice? When's the next war? I quite want to revive. There's that problem with me mysteriously dying. I'm really worried about my corpse, you know.*

"As for whether or not the rumor is true, I don't know, because we lost. The war before the last was about fifty years ago. I haven't been here for that long, so I didn't participate. However, many people risked their lives for the award The Eastern City gave upon victory. It had to be an alluring one."

*Wait, weren't you saying how strong the country was or something? How'd it end up losing? Was what you said in the beginning all junk and rubbish?*

"That cynical look you're giving me makes me want to beat you up, you know. That time, Her Majesty probably planned to obliterate Luo Yue once and for all. We were even at their doorsteps. Seeing how their soldiers won't be able to plan a good defense strategy, we could break into their doors at any time, wiping Luo Yue from the face of this earth. Who knew something would happen at that point."

The story seemed to have reached its key point. Fan Tong also put forth more concentration into listening.

"Luo Yue's Emperor Englar appeared. Five years ago, from the shape of his body, he still looked like a young child you know! He hid his face so we couldn't see him, and his body was

bound with chains for some reason, but that four-stringed sword Tian Luo Yan was real. His identity couldn't be mistaken for another."

Mi Zhong mentioned that Luo Yue's Emperor often used a double in public events even now, Fan Tong remembered. So the way they estimated the Emperor's age was from that glance five years ago. He was still a child, huh?

"Then, everything was over."

"Eh?"

That was too sudden. Fan Tong couldn't react in time.

"There's not much to say about the process. It was basically Englar waving his Tian Luo Yan, flying out like a guardian spirit for Luo Yue. He never touched the ground, just floated above the 300,000 soldiers, and then everything was over. The people were all dead, so what more is there to say? Everyone had been wiped out, so of course The Eastern City lost."

Fan Tong widened his eyes, his mouth hanging open.

"Three..."

*You sure you didn't accidentally add a zero to that number? Maybe even two zeros! 300,000! It's 300,000, you know!*

"Don't doubt me, it's 300,000. That monster used his godlike sword and wiped 300,000 of our people sparkling clean. Not even one person survived. He turned the tide around entirely on his own. Why do you think people call him a monster? Tian Luo Yan is the Emperor's weapon. The quality had to be good, so of course it was a soul-purging weapon. Those 300,000 died for real, and The Eastern City suffered a great loss of its skilled warriors. It badly hurt the country's vitality. Tragic, it is."

"...Mi Zhong, why are you still alive?"

While Mi Zhong reiterated everything as though he was there himself, he also revealed how Luo Yue's Emperor used a soul-purging weapon to kill everyone. It made no sense that Mi Zhong was still here.

"I was only a pale green tassel back then, so I was backup. All of this I heard from those soldiers who were quick enough to run away. The accuracy's really good you know."

*So you didn't see it with your own eyes? That makes the story much less believable...*

"At that point, Luo Yue's Emperor was already three gold threads. He was probably much scarier now."

*He was already three gold threads back then! Wasn't he just a kid?*

*But if he's not three gold threads, it'd be really hard to kill off 300,000 people... wait! Have I already decided to accept this 300,000 figure?*

"Seriously, how did Luo Yue foster a monster like him. Tch."

"Where was the Queen back then?"

*Now that you mention it, did the Queen and the Five Attendants not do anything?*

"With her social status, why would the Queen join the battle? Lord Luo Shi was too young, so he didn't participate. Lord Ling Shi's main duties still revolved around the Queen's side. Lord Yin Shi loves lively events, but he doesn't like killing people. Lord Wei Shi always hated these bothersome things. Lord Hui Shi could go, but Her Majesty didn't give out the order, so he didn't go. When she heard 300,000 people were wiped out, the Queen thought of going, but Luo Yue's Emperor left right after massacring the troops. He didn't rush into The Eastern City, so they didn't have a chance to meet."

*Everyone seems to have an excuse, don't they? Yeah, leave the New Residents to die. I bet there weren't many Natural Residents in those 300,000 soldiers, were there?*

“Who's weaker between the Queen and Luo Yue's Emperor?”

“People usually ask who's stronger, don't they? Your way of questioning is so weird. Queen Xi Ying doesn't show her skills off so easily. I haven't seen her display anything or heard of anything grandiose she did in the past either, but we're residents of The Eastern City. We can't praise the other country and step down on our own, so naturally we say our Queen is stronger.”

*I think it would've been better for you to just say I don't know, instead of patching things this way. The way you said it, it sounds like the Queen is weaker, but we just can't say it to save the Queen some face...*

“My mouth is so tired from talking so much. Fan Tong, did you really not have any thoughts upon seeing all of our city's big shots for the first time? The new people before you always grabbed onto me saying a whole bunch...”

*Having a change of flavor is good for you then isn't it? Plus I didn't see all of the bigwigs. Lord Hui Shi is missing and Lord Wei Shi wasn't there.*

*Luo Shi killed me before, and Lord Ling Shi told him to kill me. Lord Yin Shi rode on his beast, crushed me, and killed me. Counting them up, it's only the Queen who hasn't killed me yet. How can you still expect me to be moved? Though you don't know these things happened...*

Since the two of them finished most of their lunches, Mi Zhong only chatted for a little more and released Fan Tong. Apparently, he had another job afterwards so one must be productive.

*Does he even go to school usually? It can't be that he's been working so much that he didn't learn anything, and thus can't rise in rankings?*

Putting the cart in front of the horse wasn't right, Mi Zhong.

When Fan Tong got back to his dorm room, Yue Tui and Zhu Sha were both inside. Seeing him come back, the two greeted him and asked if he wanted to go with them to grab some dim sums<sup>23</sup> that were currently being passed out.

*So the streets are even handing out dim sum, huh. Looks like today really is an important holiday.*

“Fan Tong, the event's about to end soon. Why did you only just come back now? The sun's about to set too.”

“We were cleaning up after the parade, and I was even listening to Mi Zhong about the war that'll happen five years later.”

“Five years later?”

Zhu Sha's ears were sharp. He immediately caught the slip up.

“Five years ago...”

He said it correctly this time.

“The war five years ago? What about it?”

“Yeah, Mi Zhong told me that Luo Yue's Emperor is an incredibly terrifying person. In that war, he single-handedly killed three million people.”

*Hey, you bastard curse. Don't turn me into someone who spreads fake rumors! It's 300,000 and you made me exaggerate it to three million!*

“Three million?”

Zhu Sha scoffed with his nose, clearly not believing it. Would this be what people call, turning a nose in disgust at someone<sup>24</sup>?

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<sup>23</sup> Dim sum is the word used, but it might also be a vague term for sweets and treats.

<sup>24</sup> A Chinese phrase. No English equivalent.

"Were... were there that many people? There couldn't have been, right?"  
Yue Tui's face paled. *He couldn't have believed me, could he?*

"It was 30,000..."

*Wrong again, dammit.*

"Explain to me what happened to the other 2,970,000 people, hm?"

The look Zhu Sha was giving him kept getting worse and worse. Yikes.

"Fan Tong, just how many people were there?"

Yue Tui's expression was covered in question marks. He definitely just got teased.

"Uh, ah... let's eat our dim sum."

The more one talked, the more mistakes there were. Less talking, less problems. Not talking altogether, no problems at all.

*There's no need to talk. The mouth is just for eating food. I'll just be a good child and go to school tomorrow. Yup...*

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The first class, after a long vacation, was once again Wushu Xuan.

The thought of pretending to be sick and staying home crossed Fan Tong's mind. No, he'd just outright ditch, or even, never learn Wushu. Who in their right mind would go see that Tractor Teacher for no reason and get their ass whipped?

However, Yue Tui wanted to go to class, and Zhu Sha utterly despised Fan Tong's spineless attitude.

"Fan Tong, why don't you try it? You haven't even tried Wushu yet, right?"

Yue Tui warmly advocated him to try it out.

*But even without trying, I already know...*

*One knows best about himself with what talents he has or doesn't have...*

"Coward. Chicken."

Zhu Sha didn't bother to encourage him and just insulted him from the sidelines. The insults were a little too much though, Fan Tong felt.

"Fan Tong, you're really not going?"

"I'm going."

In the end, his mouth betrayed him. He couldn't stay home now that he agreed to go.

The dorms were closer to the campus than the temporary housing, so they didn't need to leave that early. Zhu Sha had even gone and gotten breakfast. He stubbornly continued eating three meals a day, but Fan Tong and Yue Tui truly respected him for that. They would rather be unhealthy than eat those rations three times a day.

When it was about time to go, the trio departed for school. Although they were going to the same school, the classroom Zhu Sha needed to go to was different, so they split up in front of Wushu Xuan's gates and each went off in their own direction.

The first class today was the Wushu lecture. Because there was a new student, the Biased Teacher started teaching from page seventy-four again.

"Equally renowned, Queen Xiying's Lunar Crescent Blade – Skies and Emperor Englar's Four Stringed Sword – Tian Luo Yan, are both considered godly artifacts. These weapons were passed down through the generations and are exclusive to each city's ruler. They originated from the same source as the Eastern City's Aegis, Qian Huan Hua and the Western City's Lunar Gown, Aifroa. With the support of these weapons and armors, the rulers who inherited them all



possessed great combat abilities. Our Queen Xiying bears a pure black tassel, an indication of the highest level..."

*Biased Teacher, I can recite this paragraph to you word for word already. The Crescent Blade, Skies. The Four Stringed Sword, Tian Luo Yan. The Aegis, Qian Huan Hua. The Lunar Gown, Aifroa. I know them clearly and thoroughly...*

No wonder so many people fell asleep in this class. Who wouldn't get sick of the same material?

"Let's learn how to rise in rank today, okay?" Yue Tui whispered to him.

"Mm." Fan Tong nodded. Learning about rising in ranks was really important. Even if he didn't have the ability to do so now, Yue Tui did.

"The student called, 'Fan Tong' over there, stop talking. Do you want to stand?"

Biased Teacher showed off how biased he was again. Yue Tui obviously talked too, and a whole sentence at that. He only uttered a sound, yet the teacher picked on him.

*Hah, Yue Tui, hurry up and learn the Eastern language form. Then we can pass notes to each other in class.*

Nothing special happened in the Wushu combat class. Actually, it was because Tractor Teacher said that since they didn't have weapons, they couldn't participate. They would have to wait until they found a weapon.

Fan Tong considered this as a form of discrimination as well. Why did he have to go find a weapon himself? He didn't even know what kind of weapon would suit him best, you know? Couldn't the teacher introduce various properties of different weapons to them before telling them to pick one? Moreover, where would he find a weapon? The Eastern City didn't hand them out for free. And he didn't have the money to buy one...

Money was now Fan Tong's number one concern, the core of his life... Without money, he couldn't do anything. That was a fact. He did think that having his own weapon was a good idea though...

Tractor Teacher even said to them, "Teaching the weapons' properties is the lecture class' responsibility. The combat class is not responsible for that." The lecture class was Biased Teacher's class, wasn't it? The problem was that he only talked about Tian Luo Yan, Skies, Qian Huan Hua, and Aifroa day after day! *When will I ever learn about our normal, common weapons?*

"Fan Tong, what sort of weapon do you want?"

Yue Tui asked, on their way towards the information center for rankings.

"Ah, about that..."

To be honest, he never really gave it much thought.

In his original world, not everyone needed to carry weapons around. Only some special professions required them, and even then, those people didn't carry weapons around casually. For a commoner like him, his job was to happily stay in his little hut and be protected.

Plus, in his original world, the weapon of choice was quite obvious...

"What about you, Yue Tui? I haven't thought of it yet."

"Me? I think... a normal knife is fine. As long as it's fairly sharp, it's good. Anything's fine."

Yue Tui's answer perplexed him.

"Why? I heard the weapons in this world can't talk. Aren't weapons that can't talk better?"

As he said the sentence incorrectly, Fan Tong also recalled that Yue Tui might not have learned about this sort of common knowledge in The Eastern City yet. He might not have known the weapons in this world could talk.

"Eh? Shouldn't weapons that can talk be better? The ones that can't talk are usually household tools or weapons that failed during production. I'm fine with this kind of weapon."

So Yue Tui knew, and very well at that. Then, why? Too confident in his abilities? Was he thinking about its monetary value? Weapons that can talk would definitely be more expensive.

"Then, why?"

Fan Tong continued to trouble Yue Tui.

"No reason in particular... just that."

*You're acting weird, Yue Tui.*

At the registration place, they found out the ways to rise from the rank of a white tassel. The first method was, naturally, challenging someone higher in rank than oneself and winning. Yue Tui already said that he wouldn't consider this method, so they resorted to the second method.

As one leaves the Eastern City and walks southwest, one would reach Resource Area 1. Creatures with little to no offensive power lurked in that plot of land.

In that area was a creature called the, "land chicken." If one got hold of good, quality feathers from it, the feathers could be used for many things, such as filling clothes, pillows, and blankets. White tassels only needed to get three hundred of these feathers and they would become pale greens.

The Eastern City didn't care how you got the feathers. You could steal it from someone, or if you have money, you can buy a pillow from a store and just rip out the feathers from inside. In the end, if you are not skilled enough and a lower rank happened to challenge you, you lose at your own cost. If you accidentally became a white tassel again, you could just grab another three hundred feathers.

Different ranks had different responsibilities and tasks. Although the classes for pale greens were about the same as the whites, they still had other "homework".

They heard that the tasks for raising sub-ranks in the greens were collecting different materials from Resource Area 1. Only when one reached the blue ranks did they do something else.

"Fan Tong, this is great. Once we get six hundred feathers, you can become a pale green tassel too."

Yue Tui looked really happy for him, but Fan Tong didn't know how to feel.

Who knew how hard it would be to get those feathers? Maybe three hundred was already hell. Was he supposed to get Yue Tui to collect the feathers for him? That would be too much, wouldn't it?

*Hah, and what does that "land chicken" even look like? How dangerous is it,* Fan Tong wondered. If it was simply plucking a random chicken, maybe he could take care of that himself...

Zhu Sha was a pale green tassel already, so he could ask him. He had to have gotten the three hundred feathers before.

"I don't know."

"Eh?"

Unfortunately, Zhu Sha sent back an unexpected reply.

On another note, the afternoon consisted of the class in which Fan Tong had no hope in at all. There were two classes in a row, so Fan Tong could only blink his eyes on the side the entire period, while Yue Tui learned a bunch of new tricks again.

"I heard we had to pluck three hundred feathers and thought it was too troublesome, so I picked a random pale green tassel and pushed him into an alleyway and defeated him."

...

*Why did you have to push him into an alleyway...*

"Eh? If it's like this, then how is it recorded?"

Yue Tui questioned in surprise. If no one saw it, who could prove it happened?

"The key point to a challenge is the giving of one's tassel to the winning party. Before the other person strikes you unconscious or kills you, you strike him unconscious, kill him, or steal the tassel on him. A success or failure will be recorded on the tassel. If you succeed, you take that tassel and walk straight to rankings department. As for the losing party, on the day salaries are paid, the administration would naturally get someone to retrieve his tassel and issue a new, lower-ranked one.

*Oh, so you can't sneak up on someone. Just who was the unlucky guy that got pushed back into being a white thanks to you...?*

"Is that how it is..."

Yue Tui laughed dryly. He didn't actually want to understand the rules to challenges so discreetly.

"When do you guys plan to pluck those feathers?"

"Tomorrow, probably. We only have class in the early afternoon tomorrow."

All students had class only in the morning tomorrow. There were four days a month like this. Aside from this, there was a day off every six days. It was quite convenient when counting this using a seven-day week.

"Then I'll go with you guys. It seems the requirement to get out of the grass green rank is to gather chicken skin, so we can do this together."

Chicken skin?

*Chicken skin—?*

*Can you please enlighten me on how many pieces of skin that is... It would require a great deal of handicraft to cut off something like skin...*

"Zhu Sha, how many skins do you need?"

As he thought, Yue Tui wanted to ask the same question.

"A hundred, it seems."

*Mm, good, less than feathers. No, no, no, wait, wait. This isn't good at all. How many feathers are there on a chicken? Well, there's only one skin!*

You don't need to kill the chicken for their feathers, but how can you get the skin without killing the chicken! Does that mean he'd have to kill a hundred chickens?!

*I've never killed any small animal in my whole life! No one has ever told me how to kill them before and I also haven't even seen one killed before!*

"Then let's go together tomorrow."

Yue Tui smiled at Zhu Sha. *Don't be tricked, Yue Tui! You didn't have to kill the chickens earlier, but now you do once he's going—*

"Fan Tong, your expression turned weird again. Are you not feeling well?"

*Yes, I feel very unwell. Right, how do you people plan on killing the chickens? There doesn't seem to be a weapon on you. Karate chop them? Are you going to strangle them? Break their necks? Smash their brains into mush?*

"Fan Tong, your expression is getting worse and worse. Do you want to rest...?"

Yue Tui genuinely cared for him, but this wasn't the time to be touched. Not the time to be touched, you know—

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Let's go! To skin chickens and pluck feathers!

Usually, one was supposed to shout this passionately, but since killing chickens came before the skinning and plucking, Fan Tong couldn't muster any feelings of excitement, and he vaguely wanted to scream for his life.

"Fan Tong, let's meet up with Zhu Sha now."

Yue Tui said, after Fan Tong sat through two Fuzhou classes absent-mindedly.

*Can I not go—*

Despite the internal struggle, he was dragged away by Yue Tui. They happened upon Mi Zhong as they neared the gates, and the two sides greeted each other hospitably.

"Oh? You guys are going to Resource Area 1? Plucking feathers and leveling up, hmm?"

"Yeah, my roommate has to skin them."

Yue Tui smiled back.

Fan Tong suddenly thought of something when he saw Mi Zhong.

"Mi Zhong, the reason you haven't become a grass green, isn't because you have trouble killing chickens, is it..."

"Of course not."

Mi Zhong's expression became really terrifying.

"Chicken skins sell for one string each! Even if I skinned one, how can I be willing to hand it in! I was already extremely hurt when I turned in the feathers. Three hundred feathers accounts to a hundred strings, you know!"

*I think it's more practical for you to level up and get a stable salary, honestly.*

"Is that so, we'll be heading off on our own then..."

"Good luck. It might not be easy for you guys to get the feathers."

Mi Zhong said enigmatically as he left. They left the gates and met up with Zhu Sha, the three of them understood what Mi Zhong meant only after making their way to Resource Area 1.

Zhu Sha brought a picture of the land chickens. They were ugly... but that wasn't important. They were sluggish... that wasn't important either. Seeing the actual chicken, the three realized these things were even bigger than humans... but that wasn't important either.

On the entire chicken, there was only one feather on top of its head. This meant they would have to kill six hundred chickens, adding to Fan Tong's trauma and guilt, but that was still not what was important.

What was important was that there was no class for anyone this afternoon, so plenty of people crowded the place. What was worse, some ill-natured classmates purposely hogged the chickens they were after to prevent them from getting any spoils.

This sort of behavior was clearly pointed at Yue Tui, which were also acts of discrimination against a Westerner.

"They're too much!"

Zhu Sha's anger jar was about to shatter when they ran around for two hours and still hadn't harvested a thing.

At the same time, he saw another isolated land chicken quickly killed off by a bunch of giggling students in the midst of its cooing, which then had its skin scraped off and its feather plucked. Only the part of the skin that was attached to the feather was required for pale greens to become grass greens. One could chop it off very easily.

It sounded more reasonably that way anyways. Fan Tong couldn't imagine someone carrying a hundred pieces of skin, each larger than one's self. But at the same time, this made it really inconvenient for the others to interfere. A simple swing of the blade, and they would be left with nothing.

"What's wrong with you people, to bully new students like this!"

Yes, the most infuriating part of this whole ordeal was that these people weren't even here to collect materials for leveling. They were mostly blue tassels already, and some reds participated as well, albeit not many.

"What right does a Westerner have to come here and level up?"

"It'd be best if he stayed a white tassel forever. Those who side with Westerners are guilty as well. You deserve this!"

Even if they tried to argue with the people, the groups would only reply with maddening comments like these. Yue Tui had pretty much given up in the end.

"Forget it, Zhu Sha. You should go kill the chickens yourself. Don't stay with me. That'd probably be better."

He didn't tell Fan Tong to go off on his own since he didn't have the ability to kill a chicken bigger than himself, nor would he be able to pluck their feathers without killing them.

"No. It's them who're being rude. You're not the problem."

Zhu Sha rejected the suggestion. Yue Tui heaved a sigh.

"Would it really be better if I challenged them to level up?"

*Oh yeah, it's not like Yue Tui can't beat them.*

"This is terrible. What shouldn't we do?"

*What's terrible is this sentence.*

"Since we are in The Eastern City, I guess I should only use the things I've learned from here..."

*What are you being so dutiful for... Cheat a bit. They might not catch it...*

"Don't you think you guys are too much to bully girls like this!"

*Eh? When did we bully girls?*

Fan Tong's brain processed too fast and took in the words before he realized the sentence wasn't directed at them. Also, where had he heard this voice before? As he looked left and right for the speaker, that person found them as well.

"Ah!"

The one who had been yelling heatedly from having her chicken stolen away was Bi Rou. The other two girls from Room 448 were with her.

"Fan Tong, Yue Tui, Zhu Sha, you guys are here to kill chickens too?"

*I'm only here to pluck their feathers.*

From arriving at this place till now, Fan Tong had already witnessed multiple chicken murder scenes and also experienced the incredibly power of human adaptation. Fan Tong was truly scared before, but he stopped feeling anything now after seeing it happen so many times. He didn't know if this was a good or a bad thing. As for something like dying though, he would

never come to feel nothing, no matter how many times he died. That was because each death meant a hundred strings worth of money...

"Oh, are you guys having the same problem?"

Zhu Sha asked flatly. Bi Rou nodded; she and her two cute girlfriends looked like they were about to cry.

"These people are scum! What's so fun about interfering someone else at killing chickens? To discriminate against Westerners like this, they have some serious issues!"

"...Why don't we work together and try again?"

Bi Rou agreed to Yue Tui's proposition. After all, six people working together beat three people working separately. As long as they were quick, there was a chance they'd be able to get the feathers and skins.

Except...

Fan Tong counted the number of people, making an uncomfortable estimation quietly.

Summing it all, if each person was to get his or her fair share of feathers and skins, they would have to pluck one thousand two hundred feathers and skin two hundred chickens.

...

Removing two hundred skins sounds alright, but those one thousand two hundred feathers... What was that...

Telling them to kill a whole thousand two hundred chickens under such horrible competition, wouldn't that be too much to ask for? It was most likely impossible, right?

If they were unable to kill all of this, how were they going to split the loot later? Each person got three feathers if they kill twelve chickens? If they could really kill all those chickens, all of them would have enough skins to become grass-green tassels...

It seemed only Fan Tong was calculating how unrealistic this exploit was. In the meantime, they had another chicken stolen.

Those pests were obviously picking on them. There was no way they could properly kill their chickens.

"As New Residents of blue and red tassels, to get in the way of whites and greens, have you guys no honor!"

Both men and women partook in these depraved acts. None of them cared about Bi Rou's angry bellows.

"If you have the ability, why don't you ask someone strong to come help you? Hahahaha--"

"But do you even know anyone like that? Only in your dreams would a Westerner know anyone that mattered! Everyone thinks you're an eyesore!"

These blunt, cruel words naturally enflamed feelings of hate. Bi Rou glared at them, shaking as though she was about to lose all control. Fan Tong assumed she'd either refrain herself or plainly rush up to them, but her reaction was neither of those.

"Calling in a bigwig, right? Sure!"

Bi Rou frankly took out an instrument from her clothes. It was a circular badge with some buttons on top of it. Fan Tong didn't know what that was. After asking the others, he found out that was a Fuzhou "Communication Charm".

*Oh— So once you learned to Fuzhou to a certain extent, you can communicate with others like how they explained before?*

*No, wait, this wouldn't cost money as well, would it?*

“You try calling someone here. Let's see how many you can assemble. Let's see how strong they are.”

Annoying Girl A with a pink tassel laughed lavishly without any intention of preventing Bi Rou from using her Communication Charm. Their bunch just wanted to watch a show. They didn't think for an instant that some weak, new student would have a network of people who're stronger than them.

They only saw Bi Rou press a few button, and in a few moments, it looked she had found someone. She immediately cried bitterly into the charm.

“I was bullied——“

Then there was a long period of crying, and then another long period of crying...

*It looks so real! How does she do it?*

“It's nothing. Really, it's nothing. Don't worry, I'll try my best. You're coming? But I'm scared to bother you... I didn't cry, yeah, I just really want to see you. I feel horrible right now...”

*Wow, is this what you call playing cat and mouse<sup>25</sup>? We have an expert right here! And it's true! You really didn't cry!*

“But we haven't known each other for that long... is this really okay? ...You're too humble. If you're here, everything would be solved. Ah, I'm at Resource Area 1. I should wait here for you? But the area's so huge, how are you going to find me... Ah, what are you saying something so embarrassing all of a sudden for—“

Bi Rou covered her cheek with one hand in the middle of talking, her body shedding a pink aura... *Yeah, it's better not to know what she had heard.*

“Alright, I know. Don't hurry yourself. No matter how long it takes, I'll be waiting for you.”

She finally finished. Yue Tui and Zhu Sha were pretty much stunned stupid by this time. Cute Girls A and B acted as though it was natural, since they had been roommates for a while now, so they understood her to a certain degree.

Seeing Bi Rou hang up, a guy with a meat-cake for a face sneered with contempt.

“You only got one person? Did you ask the guy to come here and die? The only ones who'll come are those who fell for your looks anyways.”

*So you admit that she's beautiful. So your interfering with her is only to attract her attention? No, it's because you had no hope in the first place. That's why you're doing these twisted things, right?*

“Who cares what you think! As long as someone's here to help me. Just don't cry later!”

Bi Rou made a face at them, her attitude was completely different from when she asked for help... *Hahh, it's better for one's health to simply ignore these many pretenses of females.*

Once Bi Rou finished her call, Fan Tong curiously looked around to see if anyone was heading towards them. He as well wanted to know what kind of person Bi Rou asked for help from. Based on the amount of time Bi Rou had been in The Eastern City, the main groups she was in contact with should all be white or pale green tassels.

According to their conversation, the other party should be a guy, so as Fan Tong scanned the area, he also inspected the males more carefully. However, this was already the center of Resource Area 1. If the person came from within the city gates, it would take at least thirty minutes to get here, wouldn't it? The guy would even have to find them in this midst of people.

“Bi Rou, is the person coming to help us trustworthy?”

Cute Girl A asked her quietly.

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<sup>25</sup> Actual Chinese phrase means “loosening the reins only to grasp someone/something tighter”

“Of course. Even if only an arm of his came, it's enough.”

*...That sounds gory. What if that was true, and only one arm came? Everyone would flee in terror, huh?*

The nearby students who have come to Resource Area 1 to collect skins and feathers also saw the commotion. Whether out of curiosity or from wanting to see a show, many people had gathered to see how this would all play out.

Just what kind of person will come?

As Fan Tong pondered on this question, the situation changed.

On the ground not far from where Bi Rou was facing, a magic circle suddenly appeared. The symbols glowed, and Bi Rou's beautiful face lit up with joy. The others surrounding the area were astounded as a man appeared while the glow faded away.

If they were astounded to see the magic circle, then seeing who the man was created a cause for screams.

“Xiao Rou, I'm here. What's wrong? Are you hurt?”

A clear, refreshing voice, black flowing hair, and that handsome appearance that'd easily intoxicate a female's heart...

Bi Rou happily pounced at him.

“Ah! You're here!”

Everyone looked at this man, who definitely was not an illusion. Then they looked at Bi Rou who called out to him gleefully. Then they looked at the man's unbelievably black tassel...

The person who came was Shufa Xuan's rector, one of The Eastern City's Five Attendants, Yin Shi.



# Personal Account

## Bi Rou

When my name was still “Yue Bi Rou” and I still lived in the Western City, I would never have thought there’d be a day I’d set foot in Ye Zhi, especially not as an enemy.

The Western City is my homeland. If there hadn’t been any incidents I would have stayed there forever –

I had already been doing so for a long, long time now. I had met many people, even if our relationships weren’t necessarily amiable.

Back then, the name I used publicly was Yue Bi Rou. That was a name I gave myself, as I loved Ye Zhi’s style. My way of life was relatively free. No one really paid much attention to me. The only thing was that everything became boring. Only new tasks could catch my interest, so when the Western City sent their elite troops to seize New Residents, I would occasionally follow as a form of entertainment of sorts.

Because I disliked fame and being pointed at on the streets, I always wore a mask for all announced events like New Resident seizures. This way, even if I walked the streets and sang a song, others wouldn’t rush up for my autograph. The most they’d do was probably take an extra glance at the pretty girl nearby.

The troops from Ye Zhi differed each time, and I only followed them on occasion, so I never met him until that particular day.

Within Ye Zhi’s black-haired crowd, that person shone. I’d never seen any man so handsome. Looking back, maybe it’s because I had gotten too used to Western men that an Eastern face felt fresher? No matter, because nothing could change the fact that he’s strikingly fine. His black hair looked well-maintained and his dreamy, slightly smiling face instantly set my heart beating faster. I even noticed his tassel was pure black. A handsome and strong man...

...At that time, I must have stared blankly for a very long time as I didn’t come to my senses until after the fight had started.

When I recollected myself, his eyes coincidentally met mine. I unconsciously broke into a dumb smile. Unfortunately, I was wearing a mask so I couldn’t smile at him while revealing my actual appearance. He seemed to find this interesting though. Light of unknown purpose sparked from between his fingers, and in a moment he appeared near me, his eyes still fixated on me.

My companions thought he was going to harm me and hurriedly stepped in to block him, but he swept them off with a gesture. He then smiled while opening his mouth. Because of the noise in the background and the distance between us, I couldn’t hear him well, but I read his lips. “Name?”

This was what he asked. He spoke using the Western City's language, which was a pleasant surprise. While I fawned over how even his lips were charming, I didn't forget to answer his question.

"Yue Bi Rou."

He grinned and blew me a kiss, then returned to the battle and continued cornering my people with his.

Naturally, we lost that battle – I only cared about staring at him from beginning to end and completely failed to help out. I felt a little like a double-crossing traitor, but no one said anything that put me down and only cursed Ye Zhi's men for trying to harass me... To be honest, I felt rather happy. I just regretted that I had forgotten to ask for his name when I knew he understood the Western City's language.

I thought of him for the few days afterwards. In order to increase my chances of meeting him again, I diligently helped out in captures, but he didn't seem to come often. I was slightly disappointed, but I did get to see him a couple times. He looked very happy to see me as well and would wave, call out to me, wink, or whistle. Later on, he stopped fighting altogether and waved at me some place nearby. Only until the people from Ye Zhi lugged him back to the teleportation portal did he wave a reluctant goodbye. I wondered what the people on his side thought of this, but he seemed to be someone of rather high social status, so it shouldn't have been a problem, maybe?

I felt like I was in love, and I had once thought I'd never have any luck with this kind of thing. There were so many men in Ye Zhi. Why did I only find him attractive? I mean, he was really handsome, so much that I fell in love at first sight.

Some people greatly disapproved of my struggling feelings. They said he was always weird and had greeted others in the past, anyone he found interest in. I wasn't the only one. He was just playing.

That's all right. At least he was friendly, and my mood had improved because of his actions.

That's why I thought of going to Ye Zhi to find him when a string of events cast away my reason to stay in the Western City.

We couldn't chat or do anything in the battlefield, and everyone left very quickly every time. I felt very empty.

Without much thinking, I easily made the decision – for him, I would go to Ye Zhi. Reaching Ye Zhi wasn't difficult. The problem lay in getting in and finding him, since I didn't even know his name at this point.

On appearance alone, I doubted that I'd automatically be thought of as someone from the Western City. While capturing people, Ye Zhi had also seized Westerners. I only had to pretend to be a New Resident. Luckily no one had seen my face under the mask, so there was no danger of anyone revealing my identity. What was rather troublesome was how Ye Zhi, like the Western City, marked their residents. Marks responded to one another. I had no mark and looked nothing like a Natural Resident of the Eastern City, which would have easily made me suspicious.

I knew infiltrating Ye Zhi would be difficult, but I wanted to see him. I really wanted to see him.

Creating a temporary mark was something I could manage, so I caught a New Resident and used magic to replicate his information. After asking him a few questions, I tweaked his memories and got him to lead me into Ye Zhi and settle me in. In an attempt to know more people, I started attending school. There was still no sign of him anywhere.

The Wushu Combat class teacher was evil, to actually make every new student die. I was not a New Resident and thus couldn't regenerate, so naturally I wasn't killed off by them. This was easy enough to take care of. After the teacher finished his explanation, I immediately put on a frightened expression, sobbing immensely while hugging his feet. I begged using what I considered my sweetest tone of voice. Not long passed before the teacher let out a cough and stopped everyone, mentioning how killing a beautiful girl was a crime and that they should just obediently go to class.

Everything in Ye Zhi was a marvel to me, but all this failed to charm me without his presence.

A counterfeit mark couldn't be maintained for long, and anyone with a sharper pair of eyes would have easily seen through it. I didn't know whether I should determine a deadline for myself and leave when the time comes or face everything that comes up until the day I find him. Ultimately, I chose the latter option. I had come so far already. I'd at least have to speak with him a little so all my time and effort wouldn't have been utterly wasted.

It was on Chen Yue Jie when I finally saw him.

Following my roommates out to enjoy the festivities, I immediately caught sight of him in the carriage. He was still that handsome, that intoxicating. When I elatedly clutched my roommate's arm and asked her who he was, I finally found out his name... Yin Shi.

One of Eastern City's Five Attendants and the rector of Shufa Xuan. What a person.

After learning how to use the communication charms at school, I cheated by pairing it with magic. Now I'd only need his name to talk with him. I was moved. Even if I couldn't predict what his attitude towards me would be like or if he'd capture me as a spy after knowing my identity, I still made an excuse in the evening to sneak out to a more stranded area, "borrowed" a communication charm from someone, and eagerly tried to connect with him.

"Hello, who is this...?"

His voice rang up, sounding even better than I had imagined.

Of course, he was using the Eastern City's language now, but I had taken special measures to teach myself the language when I first arrived, so communicating was no problem.

"Ah—I can finally hear your voice. We can finally talk. I'm so touched—"

And that was my first sentence. How embarrassing.

"...? Is something the matter?"

His voice was filled with suspicion. I was absolutely thrilled but continued with more care.

"I came here to find you. I'm... a certain female magician from the Western City."

I didn't know how to introduce myself. Not one of my identities could be told to others. After hearing my response, he quickly reacted.

"I know now. You're... Yue Bi Rou?"

He was actually able to call out my name right out way. My heartbeat quickened again.

"Mm, but I'm simply Bi Rou now. You still remember my name?"

"Yeah, I love pretty Western girls the most. Why did you come to Eastern City to play?"

My face flushed upon his mention of pretty girls.

"I wanted to talk with you. I'll talk with you and then... I'll go back."

"Ah, why do you have to go back? Stay."

"But..."

"Just stay, I'll take care of you. Don't return to Luo Yue. I'll miss you."

Because he hoped for me to stay, I wavered. The problem was, returning was still the better option, probably?

“The mark on my body is fake. Sooner or later, I’ll be found out. I can’t stay. I’m really happy that I was able to talk to you as it is.”

That was a lie. I wanted to see him.

“Don’t worry about the mark. Where are you?”

I paused for a moment and told him my location. Presently, he appeared.

He entered, glowing under the moonlight. He was riding a really strange moshou no one else would have used as transportation. In my eyes, though, he looked even more suave this way. Well, I guess I’d mindlessly put a rose-colored shine on anything he did.

He widened his eyes after seeing me, apparently happy.

“Heavens! Xiao Rou! You’re beautiful! You actually came to the Eastern City just for me. I feel honored!”

I felt my face completely redden. How could he say something so embarrassing?

With a wave, he placed a real mark on me. I couldn’t even see clearly what exactly it was he did.

“Xiao Rou, are you staying? I really would take care of you. No matter what it is, as long as you need it, just find me. I’ll show up right away. Trust me.”

I nodded ferociously, only a step away from saying, “I’ll believe anything that comes out of your mouth.” After meeting him, I had already started wanting more. After meeting him, I didn’t want to leave at all.

“That’s great. So you’re staying then? Then I won’t be so lonely from now on. Ah, are you free right now? Let’s go on a date.”

*Eh eh eh eh! A date! Now?*

I wanted to scream. *If it’s a date, I, I still want to go back and dress up for a good three hours or so and beautify myself before going with him, you know!*

But, a date? On this moshou?

I froze slightly. The beast’s path looked dreadfully haphazard when he rode in. That didn’t look like an inviting ride others would want to try out.

But this also meant I could wrap my arms tightly around him, but... a date should be a bit more romantic, a bit more romantic you know!

“I agreed to eat dinner with my roommates, so I don’t think I can.”

“Ah, is that so?”

He looked a little disappointed.

“Then I’ll eat with you?”

Eh—

*You’re the rector of Shufa Xuan! You’re going to follow a girl into her room and eat dinner?*

*N-no! What if he charmed my roommates too?*

*There’s no way I’m sharing the guy I like!*

“Ah, someone’s looking for me, hold on.”

His communication charm lit up. After he picked it up and spoke into it a little, his face fell.

“Eh—? Ling Shi, don’t bother me. Xiao Rou is more important—Who’s Xiao Rou? My Xiao Rou, you know. From now on you have to obey her, okay? And you have to help her out when she calls. I’ve already decided, I’m not going back—What? Ying’s mad? All right all right, I’ll be on my way...”

Honestly, I didn't listen carefully to what he said, but that "my Xiao Rou" made my heart thump one large beat. But, I also heard two names of particular interest in his dialogue.

Ling Shi? I remembered them interacting quite often that morning. She was even prettier than me.

*Ying? Is that the Queen?*

*What's his relationship with them?*

"Xiao Rou, I'm sorry. Ying's looking for me. I gotta go. Just contact me if you need anything, okay? Chat with me even if there's nothing. You must, okay?"

He then let out an "ah" again, said "Wait for me here," and rode that strange moshou off somewhere. Very quickly he returned, handing me a communication charm of very good quality and a light-green tassel.

"That charm and tassel weren't yours, right? These are for you. I've already configured the settings. I'll be going now."

He really did leave in a hurry. Muttering some kind of spell, his whole person along with that moshou disappeared. If not for the communication charm in my hand, I'd have thought the whole thing was a dream.

I had two thoughts then.

One, he was even better-looking up close, so good-looking he'd make people faint.

Two, my love has a hope of blossoming now? But he seems to have other women around?

The following day, I hid in a place where no one would hear me and talked to him all day long. Although the topics were confusing and I still found what he said peculiar, it was okay. It was totally okay, because I liked him. Whether it's the strange parts of him or the normal parts, I liked them all. To me, everything about him exuded charm.

And that's how I decided to settle in Ye Zhi. Hm, I need to see myself as a resident of the Eastern City now, so I need to stop calling it Ye Zhi.

As for the Western City and what to do when I meet the people there again, I'll leave that for later.

If I'm to stay, I'm going to live well and move forward. Well, I should raise my rank then, or I won't be a good match for him, will I? It's not like I can keep my rank from the Western City.

After discussing with my roommates, I found that they also wanted to raise their rankings. As a result, we researched for places to train and decided to go tomorrow afternoon, after school.

Murdering and skinning chickens, here we come!

For my rank! And my love!

...Then again, I need to learn more about my rivals as well.

### *Character Profiles: Fan Tong Version*

Fan Tong:

This is me. Everyone should know already, but I have some kind of language deficiency. I can't even remember what day it was when I died in the original world. This is surely a depressing way to end a life. Although I really want a cliché tragedy setup in which 'a beautiful fiancé is washing her face in tears and is waiting for me to go back to my original world', there's honestly nothing like that. I feel rather sad about it. I'm currently still a useless white tassel. Please take care of me in the future as well everyone.

Luo Shi:

Hmm—a pretty boy. One of the Eastern City's Five Attendants. Prince. I do want to say that I'd rather meet a princess, but that's quite rude. He's really a good kid, it's just that he killed me once. Everyone says he's hard to get close to, but I think he's just easily embarrassed and ends up putting on a somber façade. We have a friendship worth two dinners so far. I hope this number will go up. I know it's shameful to hope for someone to treat you to food, but I really don't want to eat those public rations...

Yue Tui:

He was my neighbor and is now my roommate. Also a pretty boy, the Western version. Seeing him shine so brightly in broad daylight almost hurts my eyes... No I can't say that. It's just that looking so beautiful seriously induces jealousy from others of the same sex. All in all, he's a good-natured, gentle person. He's also my friend. Although he's a white tassel as well, he's not useless like me. Apparently he died a nasty death. I hope he'll be able to live happily in the Eastern City.

Zhu Sha:

A roommate I met after moving into the school dorms. We live in a triple and he sleeps in the bottom bunk. Ahhhhhhh, I really wanted to sleep in the bottom bunk! He's a delicate, upright kid. It seems most of the people I know are young men? His personality's a little serious so it's kind of a tricky situation for me. He didn't believe in my disability either, which hurt my feelings one way or another. Although it seems I've spoken a bunch of bad things about him, he's really a good person. He currently holds a pale green tassel.

Bi Rou:

A Westerner; a pretty girl from room 448. I admit that I'm attracted to good-looking ladies, but I also know I'd have no chance in fate with them. She also holds a pale green tassel. Her personality should be outgoing? I realized she's really good at acting after seeing her a few times. Hmm, should I say she's good at acting or good at playing with men? Anyways, all the people in contact with the pretty girl are all bigwigs. No matter who's got a loose screw in their brains, that's none of my business.

Mi Zhong:

The tour guide who was responsible for introducing all the knowledge and information I need. I'm not here on vacation though, so calling him a tour guide isn't exactly correct. My impression of this person isn't very good. He's a bit thief-like, very practical, pretends to be close with me, and babbles a bunch of irresponsible remarks. In the terms used by my other world, his type of person would be described as a wily old bird perhaps? And I'd be the greenie. Yeah. He's also a pale green tassel, and it seems he carries an enormous debt.

Yin Shi:

One of Eastern City's Five Attendants. Rector of Shufa Xuan. Truthfully, I'm not sure what he's responsible for. He's responsible for being handsome? Or maybe for acting like an idiot... You'll find out soon enough why I say this. He's really good-looking that's for sure, but many girls probably had their dreams crushed after knowing what he's really like. Could it be that you'd have to be mentally retarded to be a royal officer? I felt a bit disappointed. Then I found out he's a pure black tassel. Where's the justice! Are mental retardation and power in inverse relation?

Wei Shi:

One of Eastern City's Five Attendants. Substitute-rector for Wushu Xuan. I still haven't seen this person, so I don't really know how to introduce him. Mi Zhong says he's a bad person, so I guess he's a bad person. I heard he oppresses New Residents, which means he'll oppress me. This kind of person can't be a good person. It's alright to not know him.

Hui Shi:

One of Eastern City's Five Attendants. Rector of Wushu Xuan. This person disappeared two years ago. Luo Shi seems to be really sad because of this. I heard he's the Queen's adopted son, and is a good-looking, powerful person. I know he's handsome because everyone says Yue Tui and he look similar, which means he's handsome. I heard he was already a pale black tassel when disappeared. Just where did he go?

Xi Ying:

The Eastern City's Queen. From far away, I can only say she's an icy-looking pretty lady. I haven't spoken to her and I don't know much about her, but she's a pure black tassel so she has to be strong, right? Maybe even stronger than Lord Yin Shi? If Lord Yin Shi is the strongest around, I don't think I can accept it...

Englar:

The Western City's Young Emperor. I've only heard rumors about this person. I don't even know what he looks like. If he's called the Young Emperor, he's got to be young. I heard he already had three gold threads five years ago, which is the highest rank in The Western City. He obliterated an army of three-hundred thousand and created a shining... Cough! Vicious reputation for himself. I guess a person that can do such a thing has to be cold-blooded. To be ruled by someone like this, I wonder if The Western City is lucky or unlucky?

## Author's Note

An author's note is the kind of thing where you'd forget what you wanted to say by the time it's time to write it.

Ugh, anyways, it's like an afterword for the volume where your head turns completely blank, the same feeling as when you've crossed into another world and reincarnated. For this note in particular, I didn't start writing it until after I've finished the first two volumes of *Chen Yue*... While I was writing this story, it felt as if my whole body had entered a strange trance and couldn't stop. With the addition of various incentives, it's come to this. (Sweatdrop) I guess it's partly due to how I like hurrying to finish things as well?

The last time I wrote at this speed was in high school, I think. It's quite nostalgic now that I recall back. In all regards, this is a happy occurrence. Also because I stepped into another world (Huh?)... Volume one was finished in fifteen days. Volume two took nineteen days. This broke a personal record. (Dead)

In the last four days of writing volume one, I even wrote ten thousand words per day and finished it just like that. Other than feeling exhaustion, I also felt refreshed in both body and mind – (Gets hit)

Sigh, although I've finished volume two already, it won't be published very soon. At the earliest, you'll have to wait a few months. On the other hand, *The Silver Area* is also being released.

This is also a story I like very much. Though you can't see much plot direction in the beginning, hidden devices are inside. I tried to do something new this time. I guess anywhere Fan Tong is, there's happiness? (Eh?) As for the places without him...

So with my love for the story, I went and made stamps for it like an idiot. I even got the jade plates talked about in volume two, and I'll most likely post up pictures as well.

By the way, when I was thinking about how to do the character profiles, I once thought of introducing them like this.

Fan Tong: Rice bucket.

Luo Shi: Weak Tendency.

Yue Tui: Yue Tui Feng, a type of high-class bento. Could also be seen as leg.

Zhu Sha: Murder.

...But I thought this was a bit over the top. Of course, I thought of this as well:

Fan Tong: Main Character

Luo Shi: Side Character

Yue Tui: Main Character

Zhu Sha: Side Character

But I think the readers would kill me if I actually did that.



I thought of an idea in the end and decided to do something more interesting. This volume had Fan Tong introducing the characters, and the next one will have Yue Tui doing it. Each volume will have someone different, so we can see what everyone's like from the characters' points of view.

As for new characters, they won't be introduced until they show up in the story... Agh, that can't be helped.

Chen Yue is a new story with an entirely new structure. For its birth, I'd like to thank my good friends, Yasha, and Xiao Niao Niao. (There's no need to give everyone a nickname, miss.)

The one who recommended that I work harder and start a new series was Xiao Yu. The reason I finally decided to do it was because Yasha agreed to draw for me. It was Xiao Niao Niao\* who helped me formulate the basis for *Chen Yue*. From creating the framework to writing the story itself, I felt great satisfaction. I was working very happily during the process of creation as well. It's only right if people feel happy doing their jobs, you know. (Laughs) I hope everyone will like the story and the characters in this book as well.

Because of some health problems and extenuating circumstances, Yasha was unable to continue illustrating for this story. For consistency, the publishing company will republish volumes one to five with art by Mr. Zhu Guan, who has now taken over Yasha's role. That's why this version exists.

The only difference between this version and the original one is the art and a couple fixed typos. I would also like to thank everyone for their support in both the old version and the new.

As for more detailed information about doujinshi, story previews, and other materials, please check out my personal website. (If I have any, I'll post it up there.)

Shui Quan's Blog: The Place Ink Spreads

<http://blog.yam.com/suru8aup3>

Aside from this, you can utilize your family members as well. Sometimes, I'll have polls to gather data and understand some things. (But not very often anymore...)

Many of the notices and announcements in the blog are quite dated. I almost can't recognize myself from the past, so I hope you all don't take it too seriously either... (?)

<http://tw.club.yahoo.com/clubs/winds-with-voices>

Wind – Revolving – Resounding

Anything related to the novels will be announced in two places. The website is where the main activity is, with posts about my current mood and writing.

Then there's Plurk, where I'll be rambling about various little things. Sometimes I won't be writing a post on the website and will announce it directly on Plurk:

<http://www.plurk.com/suru8aup3>

And finally, I have the usual lesson on "Bokelai" for you all:

I keep receiving messages from readers about how they couldn't find the earlier volumes... When something like that happens... the blog comes in handy. Although you can wait until the books are restocked or place an order to the bookstore, using online websites is much more convenient and would save time. Usually, there will be discounts too.

Website: [www.books.com.tw](http://www.books.com.tw)

Of course you'd have to sign up for a membership first, but that's free.

You can then search for the book you want to buy and place the order. The important thing here is that you can pay in cash at a nearby 7-Eleven. When the book is shipped to 7-Eleven, they'll send an email to you. Then, you can tell them that you have an item from Bokelai

and pay. The items will be there for a week, and I heard there aren't any harsh penalties for not picking items up. (Gets beaten)

This way, you can choose a convenient 7-Eleven near you and no one would know about what you did... (Who?) (Don't ask me) The collection on Bokelai is usually complete, and sometimes there are autographed copies...

Then we have a lesson on Kingstone:

<http://kingstone.com.tw>

It can be used the same way. Kingstone started charging shipping fees now, and the discounts are about the same as Bokelai. You can pick up books at their various branches as well as in convenience stores like FamilyMart, OK, and HiLife. 7-Eleven is not included. Everyone can pick one that suits their needs.

Kingstone also has events for autographed copies and gifts, so if you're interested, please keep an eye out for them.

Both bookstores seem to have a reward points and special discount program.